testimonies of the global tribunal on violations of women's human rights at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights Vienna, June 1993

Center for Women's Global Leadership
testimonies of the global tribunal
on violations of women's human rights
at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights
Vienna, June 1993

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contents

- acknowledgements .................................................. 1
- program ................................................................. 2
- introduction ............................................................ 3
- testimonies ............................................................... 6
  human rights abuse in the family .................................. 6
  war crimes against women ......................................... 21
  violations of bodily integrity ....................................... 43
  socio-economic rights ............................................... 53
  political persecution and discrimination ....................... 67
- funders ................................................................. 80
- center description and publications list ......................... 80
excerpts from the vienna declaration and programme of action  June 1993

"The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community." paragraph 18

"The World Conference on Human Rights expresses its dismay at massive violations of human rights especially in the form of genocide, "ethnic cleansing" and systematic rape of women in war situations, creating mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons." paragraph 28

"The World Conference on Human Rights urges the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and that this be a priority for Governments and for the United Nations." paragraph 36

"The equal status of women and the human rights of women should be integrated into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activity." paragraph 37

"The World Conference on Human Rights stresses the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life, the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism." paragraph 38

"The World Conference on Human Rights welcomes the decision of the Commission on Human Rights to consider the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women at its fiftieth session." paragraph 40

"The World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms, on the basis of equality between women and men, a woman's right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning services, as well as equal access to education at all levels." paragraph 41
acknowledgements

The Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights was made possible through the vision, courage, energy and dedication of many, many women from around the world. While it is impossible to recognize every single person who contributed to the success of the Tribunal, there are some whose efforts are especially deserving of recognition.

Niamh Reilly was the principle coordinator of the Global Tribunal, and for her unerring and painstaking efforts our most sincere thanks are due. We received invaluable assistance from many people, but we must mention especially the Tribunal staff consisting of Raahi Reddi, Andreá Romani, Meera Singh, Sita Venkateswar and Tamara Xavier. In addition, Rosa Briceno, Roxanna Carrillo, Laurel Douglass, Susana Fried, Diana Gerace, Lori Heise, Jennifer Klot, Stephanie Lentini, Rosa Logar, Monica O'Connor and Anne Walker all provided ongoing support and input throughout the organizing process.

The International Coordinating Committee (ICC), which collaborated with the Center for Women's Global Leadership on the selection of the Tribunal speakers and on related planning, included Asma Abdel Halim (WILDAF, the Sudan); Marion Bethel (CAFRA, Bahamas); Florence Butegwa (WILDAF, Zimbabwe); Roxanna Carrillo (UNIFEM); Winde Evenhuis (HOM, Netherlands); Alda Facio (ILANUD, Costa Rica); Hina Jilani (AGHS Legal Aid, Pakistan); Nelia Sancho Liao (Asian Women Human Rights Council, Philippines); Rosa Logar (Austrian Women's Shelter Network); Annette Pyepops (Match International Centre, Canada); Ana Sinnett (Fund for a Compassionate Society, USA); Maria Suarez (UNIFEM, Costa Rica); and Anne Walker (International Women's Tribune Centre). In addition, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development Network (APWLW), the Family Violence Prevention Fund in San Francisco, and the International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) were co-sponsors.

The judges who presided over the Tribunal were: Justice P.N. Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India and Chair of the Asian human rights NGO AWARE; the Honorable Ed Broadbent, a former Canadian MP and President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Development in Montreal; the Honorable Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the UN 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and former Tanzanian High Commissioner to India; and the Honorable Elizabeth Odio, Minister for Justice in Costa Rica and a member of the UN Committee Against Torture. The judges worked in consultation with an advisory committee of women lawyers from different regions including: Rebecca Cook (University of Toronto Law School, Canada); Alda Facio (ILANUD, Costa Rica); Ratna Kapur (Legal Advocate, India); and Mona Zulficar (Shalakany Law Office, Egypt).

All of the testifiers are included in this publication, but each thematic segment was opened by a moderator whose remarks are not included here. The moderators were women from around the world who were active in the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights. They were Monica O'Connor (Irish Women's Aid), Nelia Sancho Liao (Asian Women Human Rights Council), Gladys Acosta (Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos), Florence Butegwa (Women in Law and Development in Africa), and myself (Center for Women's Global Leadership). Special thanks are also due to Rita Andrea, Charito Basa, Cindy Ewing, Lara Hossain, Lenu Marin, Lepa Mladjenovic, Joanne Myre, Rosane Reis, Estelle Schneider and Hei Soo Shin for their assistance and support to Tribunal speakers.

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Charlotte Bunch,
Director
global tribunal
on violations of
women’s human rights
June 15, 1993

9:00-9:30
OPENING
Charlotte Bunch
Director, Center for Women’s Global Leadership
Johanna Dohnal
Austrian Minster for Women’s Affairs
Marjorie Thorpe
Deputy Director of UNIFEM
(UN Development Fund for Women)

9:30-10:50
HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE IN THE FAMILY
Chair Monica O’Connor, Irish Women’s Aid
Gayla Thompson, USA
Perveen Martha, PAKISTAN
Stella Mukasa for Miss Dravu, UGANDA
Rosa Logar, AUSTRIA
Marla Celsa da Conceicao, BRAZIL
Sara Patricia Conceicao, COSTA RICA
Gabrielle Wilders, USA
Judge’s Statement
Elizabeth Odio, Costa Rica Minister for Justice, member of the UN Committee Against Torture.

10:50-11:15
judge’s statement

11:20-12:30
WAR CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN
Chair Nelia Sancho, Asian Women Human Rights Council
Chin Sung Chung & Bok Dong Kim, KOREA
Randa Siniora, PALESTINE
M. Asha Samad, SOMALIA
Ema Hilario, PERU
Janet Tello Cilardi for Sandra Contralez, PERU
Olga Kudryavtseva, RUSSIA
Slavica Kusic, CROATIA
Ljepa Madjenovic, SERBIA
Fadila Mornisevic & Alda Zaidig, BOSNIA/HERZEGOVINA
Judge’s Statement
Ed Broadbent, former Canadian MP and President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development

12:30-14:00
LUNCH

14:00-15:00
VIOLATIONS OF BODILY INTEGRITY
Chair Gladys Acosta, Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos (ILSA)
Lin Lap-Chew for Grazyna from Poland, THE NETHERLANDS
Nahid Toubia, SUDAN
Johanne Gilbert, CANADA
Rebeca Sevilla, PERU
Petrona Sandoval, NICARAGUA
Judge’s Statement
Justice P. N. Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India and Chair of the Asian human rights NGO AWARE

15:00-16:00
SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS
Chair Florence Butegwa, Women in Law and Development in Africa, WILDAF
Maria Lourdes de Jesus, CAPE VERDE/ITALY
Bernice See, PHILIPPINES
Charon Asotoyer, USA
Ayesha Arshad, BANGLADESH
Elaine Hewitt, BARBADOS
Judge’s Statement
Justice P. N. Bhagwati

16:00-16:10
POLITICAL PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION
Chair Charlotte Bunch, Center for Women’s Global Leadership
Marla Olea, CHILE/USA
Gertrude Foster, SOUTH AFRICA
Norma Valle and Ana Rivera-Lassén, PUERTO RICO
Khadija Messioud for “Oum Ali,” ALGERIA
Judge’s Statement
Gertrude Mongella, former Tanzanian High Commissioner to India, Secretary-General of the UN 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women

Final Judges’ Statement
Introduced by Anne Walker, Director, International Women’s Tribune Centre
introduction

The following is a compilation of the 33 testimonies presented by women from 25 countries at the Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights during the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, June 15, 1993. With tremendous courage, the women who testified at the Tribunal ended the silence surrounding violations of women's human rights and violence against women in particular. Since then, their voices have inspired many others to speak out and organize similar hearings and tribunals so that female human rights abuse may be documented and no longer tolerated or condoned by our societies.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership organized the Global Tribunal in collaboration with the International Women's Tribune Centre, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Asian Women Human Rights Council, Austrian Women's Shelter Network, Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, Family Violence Prevention Fund (United States), Humanistic Committee on Human Rights (The Netherlands), ILANUD and FIRE at Radio for Peace (Costa Rica), Match international Centre (Canada), Women in Law and Development in Africa, and the International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws. The Tribunal was part of a wider international campaign to have women's rights recognized as human rights by the United Nations and its member governments as well as by international human rights organizations. The Tribunal symbolized the culmination of years of organizing in preparation for the World Conference, that also included a worldwide petition campaign calling for the conference to comprehensively address violations of women's human rights and violence against women in particular.

The over-arching objective of the Tribunal was to provide a global forum for women to make a strong statement protesting the failures of existing human rights laws and mechanisms to ensure women's human rights. The testimonies recounted by women at the Tribunal also contributed enormously to the important task of documenting, defining and making visible violations of women's human rights which the prevalent conceptualization and practice of human rights have addressed inadequately.

By bringing patterns of gender-based human rights violations to the foreground, the women who spoke posed a series of challenges to the international human rights community. If human rights are to be taken seriously, they must be experienced as universal and indivisible, and women must have recourse to human rights instruments as a means of contesting abuses of their human rights.

In particular, the testimonies highlighted:

- the obstacles to women's enjoyment of human rights that stem from the distinction between public and private, especially around violence against women;
- the often ignored violations of female human rights in war and conflict situations;
- how some claims to cultural and religious rights impede the universality of human rights with respect to women;
- the gender-specific dimensions of already recognized international human rights violations;
- the implications for women of the secondary status of social, economic and cultural rights relative to civil and political rights; and finally,
- that violations of women's human rights occur in both industrialized and "less developed" countries.
The Tribunal testimonies were presented in five inter-connected thematic sessions. Some of the speakers delivered statements regarding the general status of women's human rights as well as specific types of female human rights abuse in their regions. Others presented personal accounts of human rights violations they themselves had suffered, or spoke on behalf of another woman not present. Whether they stood up as critics or victims of gender-based human rights abuse, all of the testifiers also spoke for the hundreds of thousands of women around the world who could not be in Vienna, and for whom the testimonies served to symbolize their lived experiences.

The testimonies given by the Tribunal participants have been transcribed and reproduced here, and are grouped according to the themes around which they were originally delivered:

**Human Rights Abuse In the Family**
Women from Austria, Brazil, Costa Rica, Pakistan, Uganda and the United States testified about the abuse of women's and girls' human rights in family contexts. Several major themes recurred throughout their testimonies, including:
- the universality of violence in women's lives;
- the fact that the "family" is not a site of unconditional safety for women or girls;
- the connection between women's economic vulnerability and violations of their human rights; and
- the obstacles to bringing so-called "private" violations to public accountability.

**War Crimes Against Women In Conflict Situations**
The speakers' accounts in this section addressed Japanese crimes against women during World War II, ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Peru, as well as more recent sites of socio-economic and political upheaval including Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, and Russia. The women's testimonies underscored three major themes with regard to conflict situations:
- women's bodies are figuratively and actually the site of combat in wartime;
- women's human rights are violated through the exploitation of familial relationships; and
- women suffer disproportionately from economic and social dislocations caused by conflict.

**Violations of Women's Bodily Integrity**
The women testifying in this section exposed how patterns of coercion and violence against women permeate broader social, cultural and economic institutions and practices aimed at controlling women's sexuality and reproduction. Testimony of women from Canada, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, and Sudan highlighted four major themes:
- international economic and structural upheavals are resulting in the proliferation of new or revised forms of exploitation of women sexually and economically;
- violations of women's bodily integrity and denial of their reproductive rights are often defended or excused in all parts of the world in the name of cultural or religious practice and expression;
- women's human rights abuse as the result of forced conformity to heterosexual norms is pervasive; and
- women who are physically challenged or "disabled" face additional gender-specific socially constructed obstacles to the realization of their human rights.

**Socio-economic Violations of Women's Human Rights**
The women who testified in this section addressed the impact of female economic marginalization, the increasing incidence of female-supported households which are denied societal support, and discrimination in racist or colonial contexts, all of which foster women's vulnerability to human rights abuse.
These testimonies by women from Bangladesh, Barbados, Cape Verde, the Philippines, and the United States (Native American) reveal that immigrant women, indigenous women, and women workers across the globe have severely curtailed access to legal, monetary and institutional resources in their daily struggle for human dignity. Their accounts reported on:

- socio-economic violations against migrant women;
- the situation of indigenous women in the context of human rights violations against their group;
- human rights concerns affecting women who organize in trade unions and the women they represent;
- the human rights implications of structural adjustment policies on women’s lives.

**Gender-based Political Persecution and Discrimination**

In this session, women from Algeria, Chile/USA, Puerto Rico, and South Africa addressed three dimensions of the political persecution and discrimination women suffer:

- Women often face gender-based persecution in detention as well as state-mediated harassment in civil society.
- With growing numbers of women migrants and refugees globally, a system of human rights protection based on one’s membership in a nation-state is inadequate, especially where there is gender-blindness to the kinds of human rights violations that women migrants and refugees face.
- In balancing the cultural and/or religious freedom of expression of groups against the rights of individuals, women’s political and civil rights are often sacrificed.

There are between five and seven testimonies for each of the themes outlined above. Only minimal editing for the purposes of clarity has been done.

For those who are interested in knowing more about the Global Tribunal, a 48 minute video account “The Vienna Tribunal: Women’s Rights are Human Rights” is available from Augusta Productions (phone/Fax 1.709.753.1861), and from the Center for Women’s Global Leadership. Another publication about the Tribunal and the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights entitled *Demanding Accountability: The Global Campaign and Vienna Tribunal on Women’s Human Rights* can also be ordered from the Global Center or from Women Ink (phone 1.212.661.2704 or fax 1.212.687.8633). *Demanding Accountability* contains an extended discussion of the mobilization and organization process both prior to and after the Tribunal, analyses of the significance and implications of the testimonies themselves, the judges’ statements at the Tribunal, and other key documents of the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights.

Charlotte Bunch,  
Director  

Niamh Reilly,  
Senior Program Associate
testimonies
on human rights abuse
in the family

Gayla Thompson
USA

Did you know that domestic violence results in more injuries to women than mugging, rape, and auto accidents combined?

I was really nervous all day today about coming up here because I have been going through this for so many years and have found so few people who care about what happens to battered women.

I was beaten very badly many times by my husband. This man, that I walked down the aisle with, where there was supposed to be love, violated me. I married this man, but he beat me and kicked me. He beat me bad enough to cause an abortion. He kicked babies out of my stomach and beat me without any mercy.

On one incident in particular, we had an argument and he beat me, he punched me, he kicked me. I was able to get away at one point and call the police. They told me I had to stay in the house because they could not do anything if I was not there. So after my call, my husband decided to beat me again. He threw me against the wall, and when the police actually came into the home I was on the floor and he was on top of me punching me in the face. The reason I have all this makeup on my face is that I have permanent black eyes and scars.

Because my husband had on his police uniform, the other officers—there is this brotherhood among police officers—they decided they could join in and beat me and punch me while I was on the ground. They thought I was fair game and so they joined in. They did not care that I was pregnant. I later found out that my husband had to beat me because his girlfriend would leave him if I had this child.

I spoke to the Commissioner of Police. I wrote letters. I was told that I could not file a warrant against my husband because he was a police officer, that those issues had to be taken up with Internal Affairs. I spoke to internal Affairs, I wrote letters to Internal Affairs, and because my husband and the other officers decided that I had a gun and that is why they had to beat me so badly, I received no help. The police department wiped clean all of the letters I had written, the complaints I had filed, and because he was a police officer, I was not able to prosecute. I was not able to get a protection order. I was not able to get anything.

I was not able to go to work for three weeks. I could not raise my arms any higher than this. When I went to the hospital that day, they thought that I had been in an automobile accident. But I said, no, that I had been beaten by my husband.

My attorney never went into court for me. I found that when you are married and only working part-time, they will not represent your rights. There was medical attention that I needed, mental health attention
that I needed, but my rights were denied straight across the board. I became suicidal. I was put on heavy anti-depressants.

It has taken me years just to get to this point. And even to this day, my rights are denied. So it’s important that people in this room really understand. It’s hard because I wonder how many people in the audience, how many people here on the panel, are here because they are concerned with women’s human rights or are here because it’s some place to go?

When you destroy the life of a woman, if she has children, then you are also destroying the lives of those children so that you have a chain effect. Because of my depression, my son suffers from depression. I still have nightmares. I still have night sweats and I have lost my self-esteem. All the things I had hoped for and believed in were lost.

I got to the point where I blamed my parents. I felt it was their fault because they never beat me as a child. My rationale was, well, if they had beaten me as a child, I would have been able to come to this marriage and understand that beating was okay.

I came from a Catholic family, a good family. I was the only daughter with three brothers. I went to Catholic school and so went to church everyday. I wanted to be an attorney, to work for the FBI. I spent time studying at Moscow University in Leningrad. I was studying the Russian language. I came from a family background where the things that have happened to me were not part of my growing up.

And when you are a Catholic, you tend to stay because it is part of your religion. You grow up and you take on the vows of marriage; you really believe in your heart that as a woman it’s up to you to make things work. People say, “Well, why did you stay?” You stayed because those are your duties and that’s what you are supposed to do as a woman.

But there’s also nowhere to go. I have found through the court systems that there are no referrals for women who are coming in as battered wives. It doesn’t matter if you are coming into court with a broken arm. I have scars on my face and on my body that I will have until I die. I found no help through the court system, through the police, nor through the counseling techniques which are just now realizing the seriousness of battery. It is a new field for them, and they are not equipped to deal with the effects of battery.

I used to joke about being crazy. Now I suffer from delayed stress syndrome. Loud noises upset me. Yelling upsets me. I’ve lost so much of my life and I’m just starting to put it all back again.

It is important that you understand. I brought up the issue of abuse at a workshop yesterday and people became very, very hush-hush. No one wants to talk about the abuses that women are receiving on a daily basis. Everybody in this room, whether they admit it or not, has been abused, or they have a wife, a sister, a cousin, a niece, an aunt, a neighbor, or a grandparent who has been abused. Until women—women more so than men—until women decide to take a stand and say, “I refuse to be abused, I refuse to let my neighbor, my cousin, my sister, my mother be abused,” it doesn’t matter what is said here at this podium today. If we don’t sign petitions, if we don’t address the issues and make it clear that women have human rights—period—it doesn’t matter what we ask for later. If our basic human rights are not being met, we will have nothing.

I think until women unite across the globe, across their colors, and realize that we have things we have to fight and combat as women, not as minority women, but as women as a whole, and until women unite totally, we are always going to have issues and these obstacles. We must stand, stand together, and stand strong and demand that we have the rights that were due us from the day we were brought onto this earth. Thank you.

An African American woman from Buffalo, NY. Thompson was battered by her former husband, a police officer, and other members of his department. She had two miscarriages as a result. The police department told her it was not possible to prosecute police officers. She talked about the multiple symptoms of battered women and the failure of the US political system to deal with batterers.
Perveen Martha
Pakistan

My name is Perveen Martha. I belong to a poor family of Lahore. Both my mother and father are sweepers. We are ten brothers and sisters. We received a nominal education. All five sisters are married. My parents arranged my marriage with Joseph, an electrician at the American Consulate in Lahore, on 10th July 1977. Joseph’s mother is an aya (maid) and his father, Sunny, is a cook.

My in-laws are Urdu-speaking and live in a joint family system. For some time, my relationship with my in-laws was cordial and during that time I had three children. We are a Punjabi-speaking family, but when I spoke Punjabi in my in-laws’ house, I was ridiculed by everyone and developed an inferiority complex as a result. Even my brothers and sisters were laughed at because they spoke Punjabi.

Everyone in my in-laws house drank alcohol and would force me to drink. I did not like alcohol and that made my husband and his family look down on me. My husband started to bring strange women to the house. When I tried to stop him he began to physically abuse me. I complained to his parents, but they only called me names and said, “You don’t fit into this household. Go find another place to live or else we will make sure that our son divorces you.”

Thereafter, they started threatening me with all kinds of violence like, “We will kill you or burn you to death.” I thought these were mere threats. They stopped my family members from visiting me. After this, I often suffered physical abuse at the hands of my husband and in-laws.

My husband started accusing me of being a “loose woman.” He accused me of having an illicit relationship with my elder sister’s husband, which was totally baseless. My in-laws started treating me like a pariah. They would say that I was suffering from cancer and tuberculosis. I was not allowed to touch any household utensils. I had to start cooking my own food separately and keep my eating dishes separate. Many times I was thrown out of the house by my husband or in-laws, but my parents would take me back and plead with my in-laws to let me stay.

On February 24, 1984, while I was cooking food for myself, my husband, Joseph, began screaming at me. He picked up a gallon of kerosene oil, threw it on me, and lit a match. I ran here and there screaming so wildly that I could be heard outside the house. My husband and his family then tried to put the fire out, but by then my body was badly burnt.

Then my in-laws started pleading with me not to report this matter or to tell anyone that I had been deliberately set on fire. They also threatened that if I told anyone they would take my children away from me. I was admitted to Mayo Hospital in Lahore. Nobody at the hospital asked me how I had gotten burned, but began giving me first aid as an accident patient. No police proceedings were initiated.

I told no one of what had actually occurred. I was afraid that my children would be taken away from me. My in-laws told me, “Even if you tell someone, you are not going to be believed. The police need witnesses, where will you get them from? If you keep quiet, we will help you with the medical treatment, take you home, and look after you.” I was discharged from the hospital and went back home, although I had to keep going to the hospital to have the bandages changed.

After some time had passed and my wounds had healed, it became clear that my face was fully burned and scarred for life. My husband refused to keep me in the house. He kept my children and told me to leave. I had to take refuge with my parents. Then my husband initiated divorce proceedings in the court, making the plea that I had had illicit relations with my brother-in-law. But I swear to Jesus that I have never done any
such thing or ever done any wrong. The divorce case was decided against me. According to the law of our country, after this court decision, a criminal case could be initiated against me. I, being poor, could not afford a lawyer.

Then I heard about Hina Jilani, but the period of limitation for appeal was over. My father had died with grief. At the moment, I am fighting a case against Joseph for the custody of my children and for financial maintenance. During proceedings, what comes up time and time again is that I am an adulteress who has no right to seek relief.

It is now five years since they took my children away from me. And my mother-in-law is now their guardian, when I, their mother, am still alive. I cannot believe that God could allow such injustice to occur. I am a very poor and vulnerable woman. I am now living in a missionary house and trying to salvage my dignity and my life. I am fighting the courts for my children and justice. I would never have believed that God would bring me justice here today before the world.

I swear by God that I want justice for my life and for my children. I have never committed any wrongdoing and never will. I want to live, for my children. I beg, in God's name, please return my children to me. For five years my children have been out of my sight. My mother-in-law is my children's guardian. I want to live for my children.

Martha testified as a survivor of burning by her husband. She had no means of legal recourse, and to compound the gross human rights violations Martha endured in relations to the burning incident, her children were also taken from her custody.
Stella Mukasa
for Margaret Dravu
Uganda

I wish to highlight the violation of women's human rights in Uganda at all the levels in which it exists. I will give special attention to the issue of women as victims of domestic violence and the need to put women's rights on the world's human rights agenda now.

As has already been pointed out, the violations of women's human rights in Uganda occurs at various levels. The violations range from traumatic cases of domestic violence, both physical and psychological, to rape of women, defilement of children, and child marriages. Notable and very challenging is the question of polygamy within the context of the prevailing AIDS scourge. The situation is reinforced by issues like female circumcision; lack of proper health facilities; nutritional taboos; early marriage and early pregnancies; customs and cultural and religious practices which undermine women's status, such as bridewealth; widow inheritance; and superstitions that violate women's human rights in Uganda. The human rights of refugee women, as well as internally displaced women are also issues of concern.

Women are subjected to both physical and psychological violence, often by their husbands, boyfriends, and even in-laws. The offenses of domestic violence and sexual harassment are not explicitly provided for under the law, but are treated generally as assault and battery under penal law. Due to traditional attitudes ingrained in society, domestic violence is viewed as the normal wear-and-tear of marriage, with the man having the right to chastise his wife when he deems fit.

In a case reported in the papers in February this year, a man who was questioned as to why he had chopped off the head of his bride when they had been married only two weeks gave this reply: "If you buy a cow and it misbehaves what do you do?" The reply came from one of the spectators in a crowd: "You slaughter it and buy another one." This sparked off roars of laughter, even among the police, who more often than not condone the crime and ignore it as a simple, private domestic matter. There is an urgent need to specifically protect women from such violations of human rights by placing domestic violence both on the world's agenda and in national legislation.

I will give you the case of Miss Margaret Dravu. Miss Dravu is an adult female Ugandan of 29 years of age. She has been lying on a hospital bed since November, 1991 when she was a victim of domestic violence. Before she met the man who victimized her, Miss Dravu had been cohabiting with another man. They had four children but this man died in 1990. Miss Dravu remained a single parent and went back to live with her parents in Mubende-Mityana, a town about 135 km away from Kampala, the capital of Uganda. For her income, Margaret was tailoring and mending clothes in the town with her personal sewing machine.

In the same year 1990, Miss Dravu met Mr. Nkoba Geoffrey, the man who victimized her. After living together for about six months, the relationship between Miss Dravu and Mr. Nkoba turned stormy. They were constantly fighting, and on all occasions he assaulted her. The particular incident which resulted in Miss Dravu's current pathetic state happened in November, 1991. At the time, Miss Dravu had a four month old baby—the father being Mr. Nkoba. On the fateful night, Mr. Nkoba came home at around two in the morning, completely drunk. Miss Dravu had prepared dinner and had gone to sleep, leaving the lamp dimly lit for Mr. Nkoba for whenever he returned.

When he came home, she got up and opened the door for him, showed him the food, and was ready to return to bed and attend to the baby. Mr Nkoba stopped her and demanded from her a hot meal and hot
water for a bath. In order to do this, Miss Dravu would have had to light a charcoal stove to warm the food and boil the water for the bath. The baby was crying and she tried to explain that she couldn’t meet his demands.

It is at this point that Mr. Nkoba grabbed her, beat her up and kicked her after which he threw her onto the lit lamp. Beside the lamp was a plastic can which was set on fire, causing burns all over Miss Dravu’s body. She ran out of the house in flames and began to roll on the ground. When the flames were out, Mr. Nkoba picked her up, rushed her to a nearby hospital and left her there. She never saw him again. It was her father who transferred her to Mulago, the nation’s biggest hospital where she is today.

Since the incident, Miss Dravu has always had difficulty with eating. She has undergone four surgeries so far, but she is still finding it difficult to use her hands. Yet she has to fend for her four children. It was only in January this year that Miss Dravu was able to contact the Ministry of Women in Development, Culture and Youth.

We went to the hospital with the Minister and interviewed her. The ministry is still following up with the relevant authorities to have Mr. Nkoba apprehended. Worst of all, the child that Miss Dravu had with Mr. Nkoba died of malaria in February this year. This was due to lack of care because the baby stayed in the village with Miss Dravu’s mother. Miss Dravu still gets terrible burning sensations all over her body and needs to overcome this traumatic experience. This is only one of the numerous cases of domestic violence.

Mukasa testified on behalf of Margaret Dravu, a survivor of severe domestic violence. Dravu was assaulted and burned by her partner. Mukasa’s presentation addressed the legal barriers that prevent women’s human rights from being protected.
In Europe, hundreds of thousands of women and children are refugees. They seek refuge from violence and terror. They escape during the night, without being able to take clothing or any other belongings. If they are lucky they find relatives, friends or shelters. If they are not, they have to return to their torturers.

These women do not come from abroad; the circumstances they are trying to escape cannot be called "war." These women are refugees in their own country. They are not abused, tortured or displaced by "the enemy," but by their husband, boyfriend, or father. The place where everyone should feel the safest is the most dangerous for hundreds of thousands of women in Europe: it is predominantly in their homes that women become victims of violence, and in most cases they become victims of their male relatives. Women are abused, threatened, persecuted, and killed because they are women. They are subject to male dominance and are considered to be male property. Resistance to this dominance is met by violence and death. This is femicide.

I give you the following statistics of violence against women in Europe:

United Kingdom — an analysis of police reports in Scottish towns showed that spousal abuse was the second most frequent crime and accounted for 25% of all cases (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Norway — 25% of women in a relationship had suffered physical or sexual abuse.

Germany — According to EMMA, from October 1992 through March 1993, 124 women were killed, usually by their husband or an acquaintance (EMMA 2/1993).

Europe — between 12 and 24 million women and girls are subject to violence, not counting the former Soviet Union.

Europe — there are currently between 800 and 1000 shelters and social institutions for abused women and children; on average 40 persons live in one shelter, that is, between 32,000 and 40,000 women and children live in shelters on any given day.

Violence in Austria:

54% of all murders are committed within families; in 90% of all murder cases, women and children are the victims (Schlaffer/Bernard, 1985).

Once a month, there is an attempted murder within a family in Vienna.

in 1992, 754 women and 764 children found refuge in a total of eleven Austrian shelters.

According to police estimates, every year between 150,000 and 300,000 women are abused in Austria; Vienna police respond to up to 100 cases of domestic violence per day, accounting for one quarter of all responses.

From September 1992 through March 1993, eleven women and one girl were killed by husbands/former husbands, companions or father. The men say, "If you are not going to live with me, you are not going to live at all."

Studies and experiences from women's shelters and hotlines have shown that abused women run the greatest risk of being killed when they leave their husband/partner or show their intention to leave. This risk is not taken seriously in Austria.

Even when there have been numerous abuses and threats, as in the case of Ruza, who was killed in November 1992, the courts remained inactive. Ruza had been persecuted, abused and threatened with killing by her murderer who wanted to marry her. Ruza and her employer had complained to the police on
many occasions. Ruza fled for a few weeks to a women’s shelter, and it was known that the man owned a weapon. Despite all these facts, the court saw no reason to prosecute. Ruza had to die. The public prosecutor reacted by saying that he could only put someone in custody if there were concrete signs that the accused would actually commit the act, because “otherwise one would have to arrest every third husband.” This policy of non-interference dominates.

Acts of domestic violence are offenses which are highly under-reported. It is generally estimated that five to ten times more violent acts are committed than are reported. The attitude of the legal system is not the only reason for this under-reporting: violence against women is still treated as a “private affair” in which the state does not wish to interfere.

The policy of non-interference contradicts the legal situation in Austria. Many acts of violence are criminal acts whether they are committed within or outside the family. Nearly all acts are also offenses which would have to be taken to court and prosecuted by the state. Marital rape has also become a criminal offense in recent years.

But women and women’s organizations have learned from painful experience that the law is not applied in cases of violence against women. They often have to fight to have the police take up their cases.

A police lawyer made a study of interventions in domestic violence cases based on police and court reports. Some of his findings confirm the experience of women:

In 78% of all police actions, only conflict settlement was used as an intervention; no charges were made despite clear signs of violence.

Of all the reports of assault, only 26% were taken to court. Reaction of courts: 63% of all proceedings ended in acquittal, 12% with partial and 25% with full punishment (Born, unpublished study, 1991). This means that only 1% of all police intervention ends with a sentence.

There is no legal protection against violence against women. In Austria, civil courts can issue an injunction to make violent spouses leave the home. But it is a long and difficult fight to get such an injunction. The right of a man to stay in “his” home still outweighs the right of the woman to physical integrity. If she wants to save her health and life, the only way is to escape. Furthermore, the injunction is a very weak instrument and offers no protection against violence. If the injunction is violated, the woman receives no help from the police. She has to go to court and start proceedings which can last for months.

We must conclude that this policy of non-interference promotes violence and violates women’s human rights. In general, it can be said that state institutions in Austria and many other European countries maintain a policy of “non-intervention.” Police reports, criminal procedures, and sentences are avoided and thus violence is tolerated and made possible. While perpetrators are met with indulgence, mildness, and tolerance, victims have to face prejudices, lack of understanding, and even hostility. Women’s trust in the rule of law is low, especially in the field of violence. They have the legitimate fear of being treated badly, of being rejected and even harassed. In court, again and again they experience nobody believing them, or being treated as if they themselves had provoked the violence.

While it is obvious that banks, politicians and embassies are guarded around the clock, women are refused any protection from male violence. Women’s lives are not important enough to be protected or to warrant the money required for this protection. Despite the seriousness and frequency of domestic violence against women, these acts are treated as “family quarrels.”

Women cannot leave violent men because they depend on them financially and have no alternatives. In Austria, the average salary of a woman is not high enough to pay the rent of an apartment. Women’s shelters are often the only places where women find protection and support. But there are not enough organizations. Many of these institutions exist only because of the commitment and the unpaid work of other women. The financial means of the shelters are still insufficient. In the small town of Upper Austria, for example, the society to protect animals gets more public financial support than the shelter. There are no
Logar is coordinator of the National Network of Battered Women's Shelters in Austria. She has direct contact with thousands of Austrian women who seek refuge from violence and terror at home, escaping without bringing clothing or other belongings. She gave an overview of domestic violence in Europe.

Legal rules and obligations for the financing of shelters and hotlines by the state. Not only violence itself, but also its consequences are relegated to the "private" sphere, and the cost of the consequences have to be borne by the victims themselves.

The result of this policy is that hundreds of thousands of women in Europe live every day under a regime of violence and terror from which they cannot liberate themselves because they cannot get sufficient financial and social support. This permits, or at least does not prevent, men's reigning terror over women and their actually becoming masters over the life and death of women.

We consider these circumstances to be clear violations of women's human rights. What are violated are the rights to integrity of person, to freedom of movement and to freedom from fear as well as to equal protection of the law.
Maria Celsa da Conceicao
Brazil

I am 30 years old. I am a Brazilian of very poor origin. When I was 24, in 1987, in Rondonia State, Brazil, I was a victim of a murder attempt carried out by my former boyfriend, who wouldn't accept my desire to end our relationship.

Full of anger, he set my body on fire in front of my four-year-old son, saying that if I would not die I would look so physically injured that nobody would recognize me and no man would want me. I was a very pretty girl and I was pregnant.

I was taken to a public hospital, and before losing consciousness I was informed by the police that my boyfriend had said that I had burned myself. Besides being seriously hurt as a consequence of the burning, they told me I had had an abortion.

I stayed in the hospital for several months, burned and with infections. Even so, the hospital staff accused me of being an exhibitionist because I would protest against the lack of proper treatment. There are also violations of human rights in hospitals.

When I left the hospital, I was surprised to learn that my former boyfriend was free and that the police had not registered the crime. I looked for a women's police station, and only then did a police enquiry begin. It looked like the law was going to be put into action. The prosecutor was a black man who had understood my case and the judge who had heard my story had recommended jail for my former boyfriend's punishment. However, a new prosecutor and a new judge entered the case, and they departed from the terrible facts of my attack and instead proceeded to evaluate my life instead of judging the crime committed against me. My aggressor was absolved of all guilt. Justice has considered this case closed and there is no way to modify the decision of Justice.

Nowadays I live in Rio de Janeiro with my son, who is a traumatized child with behavior problems. This fact makes me very unhappy and guilty for he is a testimonial to the crime. He needs help. After 38 skin surgeries, I still face discrimination obtaining work as a manicurist, my occupation since I was a girl.

I received proper medical treatment and attention for my case only after feminist groups and the National Council of Women's Rights became acquainted with my situation.

The violations of my human rights that I have described are not isolated facts. This happens to many women, and few aggressors are punished. I hope that the United Nations creates a Tribunal to supervise the actions of governments in prosecuting crimes committed against women, and that in my case the Brazilian government will be considered a human rights violator for its discriminatory actions and complicity in the crime through the judicial powers in Rondonia State.

Conceicao testified as a survivor of a murder attempt by burning. The man who tried to burn Conceicao to death has not been prosecuted and is completely free which, graphically underscores the lack of legal protection available to women in domestic violence situations.
Sara Patricia Portugués
Costa Rica

I was born in San Jose, Costa Rica. I am a survivor of incest.

It is difficult for me to hear the pain of the other speakers. My presence here is a testimony that the pain can be converted into struggle. I am going to share with you some of the notes from my therapy book and also some statistical information from Fundacion Ser y Crecer. Thank you for treating me with respect.

I keep memories from the incest with care because they are a living testimony of my recovery. These words go to all the women who at some point during their lives have experienced the terrible pain of rape done by a family member.

In my particular case it started when I was around three. It is hard for me to talk about it. The memories are so destructive that many of us decide to forget them. When I was 32 years old, I started to remember. I remained silent for more than 30 years. The hardest thing for us, as survivors of incest, is to understand the silence and denial of others. It is so hard that I denied it to myself until I was 32.

Recently, I started a process of recuperation. It has been very helpful, and I started to talk with the little girl who at the age of three became alone. By talking to her, I began to understand that it was not my fault.

For many years, the fear of losing my father and my job made me remain silent. It was very difficult to accept that my father was the aggressor, to recognize that it was his fault. It was easier to think it was my fault. I belong to a society that does not protect me: when I went to talk to a priest about the incest, he advised me to pray for my sin. Society is insensitive to our pain. For a long time, I blamed myself and considered it my responsibility.

The incest took from me my childhood, my adolescence, and part of my adulthood. It has damaged me. At five years old I was examined and found to have a venereal disease. Because there was an abuse of authority, I was never able to defend myself against people in power.

I had the luck to find a specialized therapy for incest survivors, and they helped me to blame the right person. The women's organization Ser y Crecer has provided great psychological support. Consequently, my state of schizophrenia no longer exists and I have not had to go to a psychiatric hospital. They helped me to learn how to treat myself as equal and to exert my rights.

We must identify at an early age the girls who are being exposed to sexual abuse. The aggressor must be identified and the blame placed with him. The period of time over which the abuse occurred must be ascertained in order to properly support the victim. We must make a commitment to all the victims—children, girls and women—to bring to the public sphere all their experiences in order to make clear that sexual victimization is not an infantile fantasy.

We cannot talk about one right. There is a conglomeration of rights. Incest denied my physical and psychological integrity, my personal security, my freedom, and my right to choose. We cannot restrict ourselves to the traditional legal rights of women because these are not sufficient. We must learn that women and girls have the right to respect, self-esteem, solidarity, and adult protection. It is impossible that incest remain in the private sphere.

I want to denounce loudly the incest that annulled my capacity to exert my own rights. In order to acknowledge this violence against women, I would ask the United Nations and the judges present to make domestic violence and incest a human rights violation.
Gabrielle Wilders
United States

I am a 27 year old U.S. citizen. I have a B.A. in Women’s Studies and Psychology from Douglass College, Rutgers University. I currently work as a Crisis Intervention Specialist at a community-based psychiatric emergency service, where I have worked for four and one-half years. I am here today to provide testimony on my experience of sexual violence against women, both in the United States and in the international human rights community.

Some of the specific details of my story may seem isolated or unique. However, the conditions under which my situation occurred and continued are shared by women and children around the world, regardless of national origin, race, class, or perceived political rights. In my story you will hear how social constructs like the family, the public school system, the medical community, and the criminal justice system contribute to the misperception of sexual violence against women as a private matter. Because incest-rape is perceived as a private problem, it currently remains outside the jurisdiction of human rights. I am here to challenge that perception so that women may gain true equal rights. If women’s bodily integrity is allowed to be violated within the most basic social unit—the family—we cannot even begin to talk about human rights on any level.

Few cases of incest-rape in the United States are actually adjudicated. Under current law, prosecution is difficult, time consuming, and unduly painful for the victims, thereby dissuading most victims from pursuing legal proceedings and allowing most perpetrators to continue committing crimes of sexual violence. In my case, legal proceedings were initiated, but given the gravity of the crime, and its endless repercussions in my life, I did not feel like I had won a victory. The idea of justice is supposed to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. My testimony will show that even when one has access to existing protective services in the United States, as I did, the American criminal justice system fails to protect women and children.

I will begin my story in 1966 when my natural father was killed in Vietnam. At the age of 26, my mother was widowed, unemployed, and responsible for the care of my sister and me, ages two and four. Unable to support us on War Orphans Benefits provided by the U.S. Veterans Administration, my mother returned to live with her parents. Two years later, my grandfather died suddenly of a heart attack. My mother was now responsible to provide for herself, her two daughters, and her mother as well. She attempted to return to school for her degree in nursing. However, because of a lack of access to child care, she could only attend part-time and never got her degree. Having been raised a Roman Catholic, she turned to the Church for emotional support and guidance. During this time of emotional vulnerability and economic uncertainty, she met a priest who began dating her. This man was well-educated, with a Ph.D. in Philosophy from a prestigious university. Within two years, he left the priesthood to marry my mother and he legally adopted my sister and me. I believe my mother saw him as someone whom she could trust to protect and provide for us.

The “family” moved to an upper-middle class suburban community in New Jersey, where my mother continued her education and my step-father worked as the president of a government-funded community drug abuse program. Having internalized a patriarchal culture, my mother repeatedly replaced male authority figures in her life. This created the impression for me that survival without a man was not possible. My step-father had enormous stature in the family and a reputation in the community as a responsible citizen.
In 1975, when I was ten years old, my mother was diagnosed with having an inoperable brain tumor. After two years of chemotherapy, radiation, and other surgeries, she died. While she was still in a coma, my step-father came to me and told me that the doctors at Sloane-Kettering Cancer Institute, who were treating my mother, were concerned about me because her tumor had been the result of an inherited immune disorder that affected only fair-skinned females who had a history of childhood illnesses. This fit my profile and distinguished me from my sister who was dark complected. He went on to explain that if this was not taken care of during adolescence, when there was a chance of reversal, I would inevitably die at a young age, just like my mother. He detailed the cure: a new “therapy” involving sexual intercourse would provide the necessary semen to strengthen my immune system. The donor of the semen could not be a blood-relative due to the hereditary nature of the disease; this made him a compatible donor. He went on to say that I would have to be on medication and that he would have to endure painful injections in his testicles. During this explanation, he was rather emotional, saying he could not bear the thought of losing me after enduring my mother’s illness and subsequent death. He said this “therapy” would now grant us the opportunity to create a life-giving bond that we were previously unable to share because he was not my natural father. At this time, I was twelve years old.

“Therapy” took place every night for the first couple of years. He gave me pills, which I later discovered were tranquilizers. Although I knew this “therapy” was a sexual act, I believed this was a medical treatment that my life depended on. I felt I had no choice. Between the ages of twelve to sixteen I frequently developed vaginal infections, requiring medical attention. Since I depended on my step-father for transportation to and payment for medical care, I avoided telling him until I couldn’t stand the pain any longer since he would use any illness as proof of my “immune disorder.” This, in turn, would require more “therapy” more frequently. Regardless of being diagnosed as suffering from a sexually-transmitted disease on several occasions, the medical community failed to investigate the cause.

I asked him about the possibility of my becoming pregnant. He told me that I was so sick I would never be able to become pregnant. However, when I was fourteen, I became pregnant. Fearing my step-father’s reaction, on my own I hitchhiked to an abortion clinic, and with the money I earned from a summer job working in a donut shop, I aborted the pregnancy.

Throughout this time, I was frequently absent from school, my grades declined, and when present I often cried openly in my classes. Despite the apparent signs of distress, nobody at the public school intervened.

After two years, I began to refuse “therapy.” My step-father would become angry and accuse me of trying to commit suicide by refusing his life-giving attempts. He countered by ignoring me, restricting my social privileges, and refusing to buy groceries. Unable to endure these manipulations, I would eventually return. Once, after I had refused for a long period of time, a letter arrived in the mail from the “doctor” who was supposedly in charge of the research on my illness. The letter stated how vital my participation was in the “therapy,” not only for my sake, but for other young girls who suffered the same disease. If I continued to refuse, I would be hurting myself as well as them. Once again I returned.

When I was sixteen, my sister moved to college and my step-father’s behavior towards me changed. He began to demand physical affection from me—something he had never done before. He became increasingly possessive of me, restricting me from any kind of social life. He had also gotten a job transfer to California and made it clear to me that I would never be allowed to return to New Jersey, and would never see my sister, family, or friends again. I was frightened by this and decided to seek out the school psychologist. I had been seeing her for several weeks when suddenly my step-father announced our move would be within two weeks. The psychologist said she would try to arrange things so I could stay. That is when I told her that much as I wanted to stay, I could not be separated from my step-father or I would die.

I was forced to explain. She was the first person I ever told. She immediately called the child protective
services and I was told I was not allowed to return home. I was instructed to find another place to stay or I
would be placed in a Juvenile shelter. I was eventually placed in foster care. When the police confronted my
step-father, he denied everything and accused me of lying and of insanity. The school psychologist, who
took a special interest in my case, secured an attorney through a local women's organization. The attorney's
fees would be paid out of the final judgement of the civil suit for punitive and compensatory damages. After
a grand jury hearing, my step-father was indicted and charged with first, second, and third degree
aggravated sexual assault of a minor. He was given bail of ten thousand dollars, and only had to put up 10% of
that to walk free. He was permitted to leave the state, moving between California and Arizona. The next
two years I spent in and out of police stations, court rooms, lawyer's offices, judges' chambers, and medical
doctors' and psychologists' offices. He maintained his innocence and refused financial support, withholding
my War Orphan's and Social Security benefits which he continued to collect.

Before the trial date, a psychological examination of my step-father had been completed, classifying
him as a "sadistic, manipulative, compulsive, and repetitive child molester." In addition, my case included
physical evidence (the letters and the drugs), which is rare in these kinds of cases, and which should have
increased the chances of a conviction. It wasn't until my first year in college, when a court trial was
imminent, that my step-father's lawyer counseled him to offer a plea bargain.

Fearing I would have to endure a grueling and painful trial, my attorney advised me to accept the plea
bargain. I felt that a trial with an uncertain outcome was too great a risk since he had already been free for
two years, likely continuing his compulsive sexual behavior. The plea bargain seemed to secure a jail
sentence. I accepted the plea bargain. Looking back, I often regret that decision. Today, I know that if an
environment truly existed in which all individuals and public institutions recognize the rights of women to
remain free of sexual violence, both my attorney and I would have felt empowered to reject the plea
bargain. In an environment in which those rights are not universally recognized, justice is rarely achieved.

In the end, my step-father pleaded guilty to 2nd and 3rd degree sexual assault and was sentenced to
7-9 years incarceration at a treatment facility for sexual offenders. He was released from the facility after a
mere 18 months; he was judged to be responding to treatment and released for good behavior. This brief
sentence defies the seriousness of the psychological classification he had been given, as well as the
seriousness of his crimes.

In the civil trial, I was awarded $200,000 dollars in punitive and compensatory damages. To this date,
some nine years later, he has only paid approximately $10,000. He lives in financial comfort in the next
county, 30 minutes from my current home. I have heard that he has since married a woman who speaks no
English, which in my mind illustrates a continued pattern of exploiting women in unequal power
relationships, since in our part of New Jersey this woman might need to be dependent on someone who
speaks English.

Subtle and overt discrimination in the criminal and judicial systems undermine the seriousness of sexual
violence against women. It appears on the surface that there is a system in place to address sexual violence
in America. But in reality, because the systemic bias is so deep and so pervasive and the investment in
keeping sexual violence against women invisible so profound, women are in practice denied justice and equal
protection under the law.
The U.S. criminal system needs much reform in this area of the law. There is an urgent need for the international human rights community to expand their definitions of human rights to include the rights of women to remain free of sexual violence. If the United Nations takes action on this proposal, it will force institutions to develop better laws and procedures that will function to deter future abuses, and it will create a cultural environment where women and children are able to secure justice. Women of all nationalities have a stake in this task. Violence against women cannot be culturally excused. There must be a universal standard that condemns all sexual violence. The testimonies today detailing crimes against women's bodily integrity around the globe clearly communicate the need for an arena of justice beyond the prejudices of any state or local authority.
testimonies
on war crimes against women
in conflict situations

Chung Chin Sung
Korea

In conjunction with the upcoming UN World Conference on Human Rights, the Korean Council for Sexual Slavery of Japan would like to reveal to the world the stories of the unutterable sufferings experienced by so-called “Comfort Women,” who were forcibly rounded up, en masse, and exploited as sex slaves for the Japanese Army between 1932 and 1945.

When the Japanese Imperial Army rampaged the Continent of Asia at the beginning of the 1930's, it started to establish army brothels. After Japan invaded China in 1937, this practice was systematically perpetrated in almost all Japanese Army garrisons, including Manchuria, China, the South Sea Islands, and even in Japan and Korea. It is estimated that some 200,000 women were registered as sex slaves for the Japanese Army.

The important point is that these women were mostly young girls under 20 years old, forcibly detained from Korea (80% to 90%) with others from China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and even European countries. Some were kidnapped while drawing water from a well or working in the field; others were induced by officials of the colonial government to be employed in Japanese factories with good pay. All those young girls left home without imagining that they would be comfort women of Japanese soldiers. Most of them were raped on the way to army brothels.

At brothels, the comfort women usually had to entertain 30 to 40 soldiers a day, and generally more on weekends. Many of them were infected by venereal diseases and were treated with large doses of harmful drugs. Such abuse resulted in the death of a considerable number of them. We estimate that only less than 10% survived the ordeal at the close of the war.

When the war was over, Japanese soldiers rarely took their comfort women with them as they returned home. In some military outfits, the comfort women were ordered to commit suicide along with the Japanese soldiers. In other locations, they were killed in the caves or trenches, or even locked in submarines scheduled to be sunk in a deep sea. Many of them were abandoned by the Japanese Army, and had to return home by themselves with great difficulties.

After returning home, these former comfort women could not marry, or failed in marriage because of their own sense of guilt, ill health, or the bias they suffered in society. They currently live alone under severe economic difficulties and many are in failing health.

Most wars in world history have been accompanied by rapes and war prostitution. But in the case of the “Comfort Women” of the Japanese Armies, the government itself systematically planned, ordered, established, and controlled the army brothels, and forcibly abducted women from the occupied nations using the entire state apparatus. The abduction and detention of a large number of Korean women,
An executive committee member of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan, Chung, testified on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of women who were exploited as sex slaves by the Japanese army between 1932 and 1945. Chung works with the Korean Council in trying to make countries accountable for violations of women’s human rights by military institutions.

Together with a Japanese prohibition on Koreans from using their language and with their compelling the worship of the Japanese emperor, should be understood as the Japanese attempt at genocide of the Korean people. The abduction of Korean girls as comfort women was an integral part of the scheme to obliterate the Korean people and its culture.

At the time, allied western nations didn’t force Japan to pay reparations for the damages incurred during the war nor did they punish Japanese war criminals as strictly as the Germans. This was because the nations in Asia were too weak to demand such reparations. It was also because the United States wanted to stabilize the capitalist system in Asia quickly, and to this end adopted generous policies toward Japan after the war. In regard to the comfort women case, it was not until 1991, after the excavation of army materials laid bare the truth, that the Japanese Government admitted to the systematic operations of exploiting comfort women. The Japanese government is still reluctant to look into its own historical files. Its attempts to silence this heinous wartime crime against humanity (by offering a meager amount of money without admitting legal and moral responsibility) has now turned into a hot international issue.

In this situation, Japan has begun to send its Self Defense Forces to Asian countries in the name of peace-keeping operations, and is also trying to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. We are very concerned about the latest developments created by Japan. These activities of Japan, which already has a strong economic influence upon Asian countries, seems to simply mean expansion of its political and military control over these countries. Without sincere repentance for the past crimes against humanity, and due steps for the reparations, how can Japan contribute to the peace in Asia and the world? To have true friendships with Asian countries in the future, Japan should first of all clear itself of the dark and shameful records its predecessors had willfully written.

We also express our regret of the fact that the Secretary General of the UN encouraged Japan to become a permanent member of the Security Council. The international community should not forget the responsibility to request that Japan pay its due price for its wartime crimes and atrocities against the Asian nations, and should not postpone resolving this issue now. If the world does allow Japan’s current moves without judging its war crimes, it may be condoning recurrences of such atrocities in the future. Now we are witnessing the tragedy of collective and premeditated rape in Bosnia—another example of the world’s irresponsibility when faced with such crimes.

As such, to ask Japan about the war crime of “Comfort Women” is to check the ethical position of Japan before it advances to become a major world power in the political and military spheres, which is necessary to prevent the recurrence of such gross violations of human rights in the world.
Kim Bok-Dong
Korea

The First Time I Heard "Chong Shin Dae"

There were only five daughters in our family (no sons). When I was young our family had no financial problems. Back in those days if you mentioned my father's name, Kim Kyons Dai, in the Yang San, Nam Bu Dong area, there was no one who didn't know him. In Yang San, if it wasn't our rice field you couldn't farm it. But our father used other people's security deposits and it went wrong. So we lost all our property. At that time my father was ill and people threatened to take him to the police station if he didn't repay the money. So my mother and grandmother were afraid and gave their stamp (signature) so we could give the money without my father knowing. As a result, they took everything away when my father died. But there was enough left for the rest of the family to eat and live.

Farming and marrying off the daughters, even after my father died, and with no man in the family, we still managed to live okay.

My older sisters, all being of marriageable age, got married quickly to avoid being taken away by the Japanese military. As I was the fourth daughter and only fifteen years old, everyone assumed I would not be detained. Thinking I was only a young girl, I went around freely, even taking the cow out to graze. But they came asking for me. At that time it was 1941. At that time the regional officials were very powerful, so if you didn't do as they said, you were told you could not live in that region. One day the official came with a Japanese person and said, "You have to go with the Chong Shin Dae." The Japanese man was wearing a yellow uniform with no sign of what rank he held. He was a half caste Korean so he could speak Korean well. He didn't just take me away, but demanded my mother's stamp (signature) on some document. In those days women could not read, so my mother conceded to the demand believing what she was told, that I would have to work in a factory and would be free after three years.

In the End I Left My Home Town

From Yang San I went to Pusan, where there were 20 other young girls my age. They all had given the same stamp and had to come to work in a factory. So I was unknowingly unconcerned. They took us to a big storeroom with mats on the floor and told us to stay there. After a few days we were moved to Shimonosekki (Japan), and stayed there about one week. Next we went to Taiwan where we stayed for two, three or four months. We didn't do anything there, just waited. I think we were waiting for orders. We lived in a normal Taiwanese house. Saying they were Japanese police, Japanese people came and went, maintaining some kind of contact. We were allowed to come and go as we wished.

It seemed the contact was not working out well. As they said we were going to a military uniform-making factory, I assumed the decision of what district had not been finalized, so that was why we were waiting so long.

First Experience of a Comfort Woman's Life at Guangdong

From Taiwan we went to Guangdong and as soon as we arrived military doctors gave us a full check up. It was a venereal disease check. To take my clothes off and expose previously unexposed parts of my body in front of an unknown man, to spread my legs to a military doctor and to lie there on the table made me extremely afraid and wonder what this was all about. If it was a young girl today at sixteen years of age, they would know what was happening (having had some sexual education, etc.). But at that time, at sixteen years
of age you knew nothing and were really a child. I didn’t even know what a man was. To prevent the examination I kicked a lot, but saying it was compulsory, they forcibly removed my clothing and carried out the checkup. When the doctor checked me, he seemed to be questioning something but I didn’t know why.

After the examination we were taken to the “Comfort House.” The “Comfort House” was an empty fifteen story building. On the first floor were soldiers and on the second floor was the “Comfort House.” If you went as far as the fifteenth floor, it was clean and tidy like people could live there. In Guangdong, we were not free to go outside. If we went out we might be detained by Guangdong soldiers. So when we went out, soldiers carried guns and came with us. The soldiers made a bathroom for us inside the “Comfort House.”

From the second day they forced us into full-scale “comfort” work, servicing the soldiers. At the beginning I resisted receiving men. For this, they didn’t give me food and beat me. I could not continue to refuse. Thinking, “even if I resist I am hurt,” I decided to do as I was told. But, good grief, I could not endure this sexual victimization having had no experience of men. My internal sexual organs were torn and swollen. I cannot explain this suffering. Even speaking about this fact is humiliating. My only thought was to escape or die. But I could not escape.

So this was our factory?

There were many women at that place. We were not allowed to gather together but were divided in different areas. The Comfort House was located outside the army base. Ordinary soldiers would come out at 8 o’clock in the morning and went back in at 5 pm. At 7 pm the higher officers came out. On week days, I received usually about fifteen men. From Saturday to Sunday it was terrible. On week days there was time to sit and relax, but on Sundays it was unspeakable. They came in and went almost straight back out and then the next one came in and the next person and so on. It’s impossible to remember how many soldiers came in. It was tens of soldiers. Maybe more than fifty. When each soldier came in he carried a small ticket and a condom. In the evening I would take the tickets to the administrator and he would check them off. He was Japanese. I didn’t know I should receive money for the tickets. Instead, he gave us food and brought us clothing and cosmetics when we needed them. He never gave us money. He said that if the Japanese won the war, he would give us a sizeable sum of money.

During rest time, all the young girls gathered and sat together and cried. Thinking we could go home if the Japanese won, we prayed for a Japanese victory.

They prepared and gave us food, and their level of hygiene was very high.

Also, we had a thorough venereal disease check up once a week. I never caught venereal disease. Hygiene was that good. There was no venereal disease, but I sustained many injuries. When that happened, I rested until I recovered and was then sent back to receive soldiers again.

To Hong Kong, to Singapore, to Malaysia, to Java

After almost two years like that, I went to Hong Kong. This side was Hong Kong and that side was the sea. While we were there, I heard many Japanese soldiers died when they tried to advance up the peninsula because the local people put oil on the water and set fire to it. From there we proceeded to Singapore. The Singapore Comfort House was a long building partitioned off into small rooms. It was extremely hot. And then we went to Malaysia, then transferred to Java.

We were in one place for two months, then transferred to another place for two months. We kept moving, following the battle. The front line fighting was only eight kilometers away from us and we could hear the gunfire. If the soldiers occupied a new area we would follow into that area. And as there were some soldiers in the mountains, we would have to go in groups of ten to the mountains to service them for one week at a time. We went backwards and forwards like this.
Each time we moved by ship, we travelled in the lower hold of the same craft the soldiers were on. I had many photographs taken with the soldiers during that time, but I have none left now. During the “Comfort House” period I was called Ganaemura Fukuyo or Yoshiko. If I wanted to change my name, I did so regularly when we transferred to a new place. But the name I used for the longest time was Ganaemura Fukuyo.

At that time all the groups had house names. When a Unit moved, there would be discussion as to which group of girls would be sent with them. I was in Ko-ah house. We followed behind and followed behind and so on. We always kept the house name wherever we went. From Hong Kong, we continually had a Chinese woman with us and a number of Japanese women. These women were much older. We did not relate to the Japanese women.

Liberation News
Liberation was announced. Japan lost. The announcement was that we could now go home. We had no one to believe but the Japanese soldiers, because we had no possible way of knowing on our own where was where and how to get home. The Japanese Commander put us in the 16th Military Hospital. At that time, there were almost fifty women who went into the hospital. They taught us basic nursing skills, made us do the cleaning, and even taught us how to give injections. They would bring in zucchini, and tell us it was a person’s body and to give it an injection. It seems they taught us this as there were many patients and not enough helping hands. So even now, I know how to give an injection and I know about different medicines.

While I was at the hospital, my older cousin’s husband came and found me, carrying a photograph of me. Before we had left Taiwan for Guangdong, I had sent a letter and that photograph to my family to let them know I was alright. When my cousin’s husband was drafted to the South Pacific in the supplies division, my mother gave him the photograph and told him to check every place he came across where there were Korean women, search for me and bring me home. I didn’t know this man’s face, but I knew for sure this was the photograph I had sent home when I was in Taiwan. When I asked who he was, he said, “Oh Hak Suh’s son-in-law.” Oh Hak Suh is my uncle. At this stage, my cousin’s husband was already in a receiving centre.

Receiving Centre Life
My cousin’s husband said, let’s go quickly to the receiving centre. If you went to a receiving centre it meant you were quickly able to go home. At first, the hospital said they would not send me to the receiving centre, that you could not go as an individual. But due to my cousin’s husband’s persistence and his insistence that he had promised to take responsibility for me and take me home, they eventually let me go. Saying they wanted to go together, some twenty other girls from the hospital followed me and went to the receiving centre. At the centre, there were more than two hundred women. There were tall people with large noses. That was my first experience of seeing an American soldier. At the receiving centre, men were on one side and women on the other, divided by wire netting, and then off in other store room areas scattered around also. Men gave us badges of our national emblem. They didn’t ask us to do anything else. Every now and then, a U.S. soldier would come and investigate. They would empty our bags, saying they wanted to know what goods we were carrying. If people leaving the receiving centre were found to be carrying gold necklaces or goods of any value, they were not allowed to leave. So, before anyone got on the boat, they would give anything of value to those left behind and tell them to sell it and buy food.

Boarding the Boat to Return to My Homeland
After about one year in the receiving centre, I boarded a boat for home. We were on board the boat for an incredibly long time as well. There were almost three thousand people on board, hundreds of women and hundreds of men. Many had been Comfort Women, and there were a lot of women who had come
Kim is a survivor of sexual slavery during World War II. She recounted her experiences as a "Comfort Woman" raped by soldiers, providing an example of the ways in which women were and still are subjugated and used by the military during crisis situations.

Independently with their husbands to run some kind of small business. We had been given preference in coming out first, as not everyone could come out together, and the others would come later. It seemed those who entered the centre first were the first to leave.

In Pusan, we spent a week on board the boat, not allowed to go ashore. One person had died of cholera on the journey, so they wouldn't let us get off as it is an infectious disease. Although we could not get off, my cousin’s husband knew “everybody” on the Pusan coast because fishing was his family line of business. So we wrote a letter and told our family of our boat’s arrival, and my cousins and older sisters got on a boat and came out to visit, bringing Kim Chi and other food which we shared with others on the boat. After more than a week, investigations proved the person’s death was not from cholera and we were allowed to go ashore. When we went ashore, it was night time. Carrying the few belongings we had, we were sent into a room and told to hand over all the money we had from any country. The investigators were Korean and U.S.

We gave them everything we had. They then gave us each a train ticket and 1000 won.

From My Return to My Homeland Until Now

When I returned home, I was 23 years old. Having left at 16 years old, it had been eight years. My older sisters and younger sister had all gone to Japan with their families, and only my mother was left, alone, keeping the house at Yang San.

I was alone in our home town. After I had gone, many others had also been taken away. Because we all kept inside, I don't know who had gone to the comfort houses. They all just said they had been working in factories or hospitals. In fact, I also said I had been at the 16th Military Hospital all the time. In the rural areas there were no doctors, so when I gave injections to the elderly people and knew all about medicines, people believed that I had really been at the hospital all the time.

The only people that knew I was really with the comfort house were my mother and oldest sister. Later, my other sisters found out through them. My sisters all had children and were living well, which made me very jealous. At first, even my mother didn't know my secret. Because she kept on talking about trying to marry me off, I told her. So then my mother gave up on trying to make me marry.

There were girls from our group in Tong Yong and in Ko Jae. Those girls hadn’t learned anything else but this foul work, so many fell into prostitution. At age 25 or 26, there was nothing they had the ability to do but that. If you asked them if this made them disgusted, they said it was the only thing they had learned.

I started up a drinking house, because after all maybe that was all I had learned to do. But it was difficult to run this business alone. There was a lot of talk about the daughter from that house having gone to Japan and then come back to run a drinking house on her own. So after a bit, I met an older man whose marriage had failed and we got married. My husband didn’t know about my history, either. It’s now five years since he died. I feel sorry for him. I could not bear children, so he died without even one child to follow on. (With no children, there is no one to carry out the ancestral ceremony for him.) He had lots of nieces and nephews on his side of the family who he really loved. He was a good natured person who couldn’t even drink alcohol. I went to the hospital to find out why I couldn’t have children. They said there was nothing wrong with me, but they could perform a curette. The doctor didn’t know about my history.

After my husband died, I continued to run the drinking house. Now the building has been pulled down, and with the compensation money I moved into this apartment I am living in. I am now looking for a job. What I want these days is to live quietly like this with my old wounds left alone, unprovoked. Before I die, I also have to receive my compensation money.
Randa Siniora
Palestine

My name is Randa Siniora. I am a Palestinian woman living under Israeli occupation. I stand here today to present to you the statement which I prepared jointly with my friend Rana Nashashibi, who was unfortunately unable to join us here today. More importantly, I am here to share with you the experiences of many Palestine women living under Israeli occupation.

In the occupied Palestinian territories, violence against Palestinian women exists in a variety of forms and at many levels: at the national level by Israeli occupiers, based on our national identity; within our society, because of patriarchal practices; because of the fundamentalist movement; and within our own homes.

As Palestinian women living under occupation, we face violence at the hands of the Israeli occupier. All Palestinians are subject to the violence, but Palestinian women also face threats of torture, blackmail, and repression. Sexual harassment, insults, and intimidation are part of daily life for many women since the perpetrators are usually male soldiers. They man the look-out posts on the roofs of Palestinian homes, drive around in military jeeps throughout the villages, and shout curses through loud speakers.

Violence Against Women: The Experience of Palestinian Women

For decades, we have denied, minimized, or accepted violence against women and children. Many believed, and still believe, that husbands have the right to hit their wives and their children; sexual assault was considered a Western problem which did not exist in Arab society. In the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, however, there is a growing awareness of these problems, and women are finding the courage to uncover and confront these painful problems. But the Israeli occupation hinders us from building support systems, and we face a critical shortage of qualified counselors and mental health workers. Under the occupation, all Palestinians face daily infringement of basic human rights: restricted movement, beatings, imprisonment, confiscation of land, house demolitions and so on. However, rarely in Palestine do we associate human rights violations with such issues as physical, sexual or psychological abuse. We tend to think of human rights violations strictly in terms of the infringement of our national rights as Palestinians. The lack of awareness regarding women's and children's rights as human rights issues reflects the poor status of women and children in our society.

Violence against women and children in our society is not a lower-class problem, nor is it the problem of the uneducated or a specific religious tradition. Violence against women and children cuts across religious and class lines, and we are often abused within the walls of our own homes at the hands of those closest to us. The incidence of sexual assault against women and girls taking place within the home (by a family member or friend) has been estimated to be at least 80%—a figure much higher than that of women in Western countries (which is usually about 60%). Unfortunately, given the extreme sensitivity of the issue, very little research has been done regarding the issue of violence against women and children in our society.

Palestinian grassroots women's organizations committed to improving the status of women politically, socially, and economically, firmly believe in the integration of women's social and political freedoms. We aim at bringing about social change with respect to women by creating better understanding, greater respect, and improving the social status of women, particularly through reaching disadvantaged women and women in remote areas.

Through our work with Palestinian women, we have found a common denominator in almost all of the women's lives. Women are forced into doing things against their wills, coerced, if you like. Some women may
experience this coercion on only one occasion in their lives, but for others this coercion is the thread linking most of the important events in their lives. This coercion takes a variety of forms: from being forced to leave school at an early age, being forced to wear a veil, having to marry before she's ready or being forced to marry someone she does not want, to being forced to have children.

This coercion has various detrimental effects on women, because our women tend to take the anger and frustration out against themselves. So, a woman may suffer from depression, somatization, or hysteria, to name a few of the side effects. Another side effect for many of these women is low self-esteem and self-blame, which has a snowball effect resulting in the disempowerment of women when combined with the various other side effects.

At the basis of this coercion, and perhaps at the root of all violence, lies the patriarchal view that women and children are objects to be controlled and manipulated.

Over the past four years of the intifada, our women's movement has matured and learned a great deal. We have learned that achieving statehood will not necessarily bring about social change for women. Our women have contributed and struggled hard during the intifada, but we haven't felt that the social issues so important to us and to our rights were met seriously or with acceptance by the leadership as a whole. In fact, based on theories of fundamentalism within the Occupied Palestinian Territories, our leadership has often failed to play its role in confronting the threats to women's rights.

In spite of the conservative tendencies which encircle us, women, as I said earlier, are coming forward and speaking out about the violence against them which they experience in the family, society, and under occupation.

One factor which might help at least partially to explain why women are now speaking out is the experiences of women political prisoners in Israeli prisons. Since the beginning of the intifada, thousands of Palestinian men and women have been imprisoned and tortured. Many women were sexually assaulted during imprisonment. Fortunately, the leadership and women's organizations took an important role in elevating the status of women political prisoners, and in exposing the importance associated with virginity (as so many women have been abused). These events led to more openness within the society, and allowed women to talk about the forms of abuse they had experienced. This relatively more open and accepting atmosphere allowed other women to speak out against sexual and physical assault they face within the society at large.

She told of family violence against women in the context of a national conflict, as well as sexual harassment and violence by occupying forces.
M. Asha Samad  
Somalia

I speak to you on behalf of the beleaguered women of Somalia. You have seen their pictures. You have heard about their situation. But, strangely enough, they have never told you that this is not the first time they’ve been under attack. Our country, like many, resisted colonization and was divided into five pieces during the colonial period. Each, of course, under their own army, each with the atrocities that have been described by the previous speakers.

After independence in 1960, which was the joining together of the former Italian and the former British sections of Somalia, and after a brief period of democratically-elected government, we have had for over 20 years a very brutal dictatorship.

You see the Somali women as victims of war and conflict. Indeed, that they are. But they are also the ones most potentially able to be the peacemakers and the developers of their country.

The people making war during the colonial period or during the present period are not the women. The people developing armies, exploiting foreign aid, and giving foreign aid to countries that have been documented as terrorist states, are not the women. The people picking up the pieces, the people being raped, sexually and otherwise physically harassed, yes, we are the women. Those in the refugee camps are almost all women and children. Those suffering the harassment, not only in Somalia, but when they are escaping the country into some neighboring countries, are the women. Sometimes, the police of those countries, and other men from their own country and from those countries, often also take advantage of their impoverishment. When they are trying to get food for their children, or for other people who have survived with them, when they are trying to get legalized status in their neighboring countries or in developed countries too, quite often men have to pay bribes, and women have to pay with sex.

Tell me, please, why is it that the international community, during the horrific 1980’s in Somalia, when there was a breakdown of all civil normalcy, when the two northern cities in Somalia were actually bombed flat to the ground (just after the dictatorship in Somalia mined the area around them so people could not escape safely), tell me, why didn’t the international community censure and have an arms embargo against our government? Perhaps had they done so in the 1980’s, we would not be here talking about the crisis of the 1990’s.

After the fourth ouster of the government of Somalia in 1990, a dictatorship, a brutal dictatorship that killed, tortured, raped, maimed, disfigured, and forced into exile over a million people, after that ouster, the people of Somalia breathed a sigh of relief for one month—for less than one month’s time I should say. Generals that used to work under the former dictator started to fight among themselves, just as he had done, playing one clan against the other, to try to take over the spoils and the minerals that most of your newspapers don’t tell you exist in Somalia.

How is it that they’re still able to get arms from the international community? How is it that when the United States went in, in December 1992, they did not disarm those criminals, the so-called war-lords? How is it that instead of disarming them and stopping them from continuing to rape, torture, and kill civilians—women in particular—the international community, and the United States in particular, shook their bloody hands and invited them to peace talks? Not once, not twice, but over three times. If you’re going to “save a country”—which is certainly doubtful, in my opinion, considering the history of the country that was going in to do the so-called saving—certainly you wouldn’t go to the main criminals that have been causing the problem. I can only compare it to World War II. Can you imagine? Had Hitler survived after World War II, do
you think the Allies would have invited him to the peace talks? Well, these people are to Somalia what Hitler was to Europe.

I think it's necessary to say a few words about the Somali clan system or women in clan systems in many such countries. Men and women are born into a clan—a patrilineal clan, of course—and they stay in that clan. That's their clan of birth and death. However, women quite often marry into another clan, which is fine in peace time. But when there's a war, they may have to choose between the clan of their birth, that is, of their father, brothers, and birth, or the clan of their husband and children. What a horrible choice! There have been many cases where women were married for many years and had children; when war starts, they're considered fifth columnists, spies within the homes of their husbands, who are told to divorce and send them out (but not with their sons, of course, since the children stay on their father's side). They're just sent out because of the attitude, "we can't keep you, you're an enemy within our house." Can you imagine such a state?

It happens quite a lot, so women have more at stake for peace, and lose more in terms of war, in every situation, than men.

What have been the effects of this crisis on Somali women and Somali civilians? Of course, you've heard of it. One fifth of our children under age five have died. More than a million have been killed. We never know how many have been tortured because, as a previous speaker said, there's no way of measuring, most people are afraid to admit it, etc. There has been so much torture and so much disruption of normal life that it's hard to imagine how people survive. But of course, as women, you know, we're all survivors.

What has been the long-term effect, and the criticism of the refugee camp runners and relief agencies, is that they don't want to admit that women are often the heads of households after such a situation. If you don't have a man to represent you, you're not a full and real family. Therefore, those agencies, including some present here, administer the programs for them, do not offer them the same training that they would offer to men, and do not give them the same kind of placement or respect that they give to "real, nuclear male-headed families." This has got to stop.

I would like to give you two cases. One case is of Jamila. Jamila was a nursing mother. She had twins—boys. The situation was so bad, the starvation, the drought, and so on (which the international community, of course, knew about for more than two years and did nothing about). When the relief agencies started to come in, and when the Somalis reorganized themselves, then in order to keep the military establishment going, Somalia was targeted, as some people say, because it might be a mid-point and one of the tentacles of that new scare— the threat of international Islam which had replaced, in the opinion of many, the old threat of the red-scare. So this is a question of international politics, as usual, affecting women, children, and ordinary people. All right, Jamila had to decide because she didn't have hardly any milk and she didn't have any means of feeding both: Which of the twins would be allowed to live? Maybe neither one would live. But she had to make the decision. Can you imagine being in that situation? Which one do you think she selected? The weaker or the stronger? They were both boys. The stronger one was selected in the hope that he would live. In fact, neither one lived.

And finally, I'll give you my case. I have three nieces and nephews whose mother died. They have no relatives, but it's very hard for me, living in a developed country, to sponsor them because they're not my immediate nuclear relatives. But, well-positioned, the Canadian Catholic Church, Israel, and other places can go in and adopt a whole bunch of Somali children, bring them for education and aid and training, for what use I don't know, in their countries. But I can't do it! So therefore, I'd like to say to the people present here and to the United Nations, please do not bomb our cities! You're not hurting the General, you're hurting us. We really regret and condemn the killing of the Pakistani relief forces, but this was not done by women or civilians. It was done by one war lord who should have been disarmed six months ago.
Ema Hilario
Peru
from taped recording

I want to thank you all who are responsible for this event, and also for the presence of the UN and the other institutions who are here to recognize women’s human rights, who are here today to gather strength, experiences, and testimonies, and who will say “No” very loudly to the silence, “No” to the anonymity, and “No more violence.”

The woman who is talking to you is a national indigent from Peru. I am a woman who suffers the consequences of having struggled with life, of having to defend the life of my children, my husband, and my community using the concept of human rights.

In 1988, I was arrested because I had started a mobilization movement against the high cost of food, against unemployment, and against the lack of means for the farmers to improve their productivity. Due to this movement, the police arrested 200 women, and I was among them. They maltreated me. I was so badly beaten that I had to undergo an intestinal operation.

At this time, the country was experiencing an unrecognized internal war. In 1991 we suffered as women. The communist party from Peru, “The Shining Path,” tried to control women’s organizations. They were against popular organizations of women. They killed many women as a way to awaken fear and terror. That is why I say that we, with our organizations, are in the center; we suffer violations of our human rights by the state through the armed forces, and also through the weapons carried by the Shining Path. They would stop the people during the night to intimidate them with their weapons.

I was first exposed to the threats in May 1991. In October 1991, three women arrived at my house and treated me with aggression and violence. They brought me to the bathroom, carrying me by my hair. They put my head inside the toilet. They hit my appendix and stomach saying that I was an ideological enemy who was trying to reach for power. They said that I had offended the best ideologue (Gusman, leader of the Shining Path). These beatings happened before the eyes of my daughter, who was only 13 years old.

Then, on December 20th, six people—five men and a woman—got into my house by pretending to be people who were selling bread. At this time, my brother-in-law was visiting me, and he was the one who opened the door. He received six shots: one in the mouth, one in the face, and the rest in his body. Only two bullets were taken out; the other four are still inside him. After him, it was my husband, who was also shot, and today he still has a bullet in his back. I was paralyzed with fear, I could not move. I was on my bed, it was six in the morning. Then I turned my head. I saw this man holding a tommy gun and saying that I had not fulfilled the demands, because I was still looking for ways to reach for power. Then I protected my head with my hand against the first shot, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth. My bed was shaking. I was listening to the shots and thinking that they were killing my children and my father, who was 60 years old. I then pretended that I was dead. My face was all blood but due to my arm, and thanks to it, I am alive. After five to ten minutes my house was silent. Around 40 bullets were found in my house.

After a month hiding myself with my family like a criminal, suffering the consequences of fear, insecurity, weakness, and doubt, we left our country behind, everything that I had built without violence, the organization. We women build instead of destroy; we give birth, and defend it together, like today.

For us, it meant we had to leave the house at night, with only the clothes that we were wearing. Today I am in exile, still persecuted and menaced. It means I do not have documents. For a refugee woman, life is very hard. I cannot get a job in order to be considered useful to society.

I think that today we are strong women. We do not exclude men, but the concept of human rights goes beyond culture, faith, race, and economic status. We are here to say to the UN and to the official judges: You are the owners of the word but we also have a right to it. Millions of voices from different
countries with different languages will say: human rights are also for women, because of the difficult moments we are often subject to. Even human rights does not cover the mental torture we experience, and that is most difficult since we don't have medications for depression.

A voice, a hand, a consideration, and the resolution that women have the right to live life with dignity, to be useful, and express ideas. We regret and accept this life, but we also say that life does not have to be like this, that we have alternative proposals for today and always.

I finish by saying thank you, because to remember is to live again, and to live again, even if with pain, is easier when we are together. It will not be the only time, because even though we will be in different places, and in different countries, there will be no barriers between us. We will always struggle for our women's human rights together, despite the distances between us. Civil society will become stronger through the demands and protests of what I consider to be our effective solidarity, a solidarity that will win because of our knowledge and our influence to make them understand.

Hilarie leads a major women's group in the shantytowns of Lima. Her life has been threatened for her political activity. She testified on violence against women in conflict situations.
In the context of the political violence and the crisis caused by the effects of the structural adjustment policies implemented in Peru, violence against women has increased. It is necessary to expose these events, events that are generally tolerated and kept invisible. The administration of the justice system contributes to the problem of violence against women.

In a society surrounded by political violence, sexual violence is not perceived. It is tolerated and considered of no importance. The nonexistent response by the state makes it also responsible for the problem of sexual violence. By granting immunity to violators, the state makes the situation even worse for Peruvian women and produces a new cause for the violence in Peru.

I'll present the following testimony of a rape case not only in the name of the victim, but also in the name of the thousands of women who are sexually attacked everyday, and who cannot denounce it because they do not have the opportunity or they do not want to suffer more violations of their human rights.

In November 1989, Sandra Gonzáles was brutally raped by four workers of the city of Lima, in a place only accessible to them—the basement of a fountain located in a park of the city. They had the key of a room located there because of the kind of work they used to do. Sandra had been waiting for the bus to go home, when a man forced her into a car with three other men. She recognized them because they lived close to the place where she used to work.

For several hours they threatened her, insulted her, touched her, and battered her. Then they forced her to go into a bar, where the men began to drink a lot of alcohol, pressing her to do the same thing. She intended to escape, but she was beaten once again.

After all this, she was taken to the room located in the basement of the fountain, and there she was raped by the four of them, beating her until she became unconscious.

When she recovered enough to leave, she went to the police station nearby—where men and no women work—and reported what had happened. The police officials went to the place indicated by Sandra and only two of the men were there, showing the effects of the alcohol, and having scratches on their arms and their faces caused by Sandra as she defended herself. Although there was evidence, the police let the men go. They were never in prison during the process.

The officials in charge of the investigation also did terrible things to Sandra. They also raped her. One of them asked her to take off her underwear, and introduced his fingers into her vagina in order to prove the rape. This police officer was never punished because of the absence of proof, although he was identified by Sandra.

The police received bribe money from the rapists to modify Sandra’s report and to influence the prosecution. They gave Sandra’s family money so that they would not go ahead with the accusation. The police became violators of her rights like the rapists.

They did not tell her to bring her underwear to the serological examination, and then claimed she was the one who refused to provide them. They did not consider the testimonies of the two policemen who found the rapists at the scene of the crime.

Sandra understood that the policemen were on the side of the rapists, but she did not abandon the process. She went ahead with it, supported by lawyers from DEMUS (Bureau of the Defense of Women’s Rights, member of the Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women’s Rights - CLADEM Peru).
The story in relation to the justice system was not different. During the whole process, she was not considered a victim, but a culpable party to the rape.

Sandra had to wait a long time for her case to be heard. She had to be examined by a medical doctor, and this was done in the presence of several people, without consideration of her emotional state. The criminal process was never carried out in private, even though the law mandates that the victim should have privacy. But there were more than 20 people in the room, including lawyers, policemen, and various people who had no relation to the case, when Sandra was questioned. Much of the trial was not held on the days scheduled. As Sandra's lawyers, we were not notified and so we were not able to act for her. At the same time, the judge would not consider the evidence of the presence of semen on her underwear, and tolerated the absence of the accused men during the whole process.

Finally, the judge gave a ruling absolving all of them, based on Sandra's modified testimony, without considering that in this case, as in few others, a good deal of evidence existed, such as the victim's statement and the legal medical certificate which included all the physical injuries she had suffered. The medical document was only used in the final ruling to point out that she was a woman who presented "old defloration," meaning she was not a virgin at the moment of the rape. In Peru, that information is written in the medical report as a very important fact (along with the age of the victim) in order to qualify her behavior.

Sandra was mistreated with offensive questions and other humiliating treatment. She was not treated as a victim, but as the accused.

They did not stop when they saw her crying, humiliated, and violated. How could it be that they were declared innocent with all this proof? Under what circumstances could they be found guilty? We are fighting incredibly hard and we have gotten the court to annul the first trial. We are trying to get a new trial for Sandra—four years after she was raped.

This is a case which shows how the system of human rights defense does not consider the violation of women's human rights, specifically for women who have been sexually abused. I thank you for the opportunity to present Sandra's story to this Tribunal and to recognize that she is a courageous and strong woman to continue this fight.

To finish, I want to mention two things. First, this case must be emphasized because the granting of immunity to Sandra's violators will make men think that they have an unrestricted right to possess a woman's body as many times as they want. Second, sexual violation is a violation of human rights and it cannot be allowed to happen that in Peru, the violator can marry the victim in order to "close" his case; in the case of many rapists, the first to violate a woman is the one who can first decide to marry his victim or not.

Tella, a feminist lawyer for CLADEM, which is a Latin American women's legal service, testified on behalf of Sandra Gonzáles, who was raped by four employees of the local municipality.

All went free.
Olga Kudryavtseva

Russia

My name is Olga Kudryavtseva. I am a photographer, a Russian now living in Ossetia, and a member of the Russian Photographer’s Union. Ossetia is in the Caucasus Mountains. The southern portion is technically part of the Republic of Georgia and the north is a part of Russia. Such a partitioning of a nation is happening once again, as it did before and during the Soviet period.

Over the past three years, Ossetia has become one of the most awful “hotspots” in the Caucasus and in Russia. Very few journalists have come to the region since the conflict began—the violence, the killings—and only a handful of photographers have documented the impact on the people, especially on the women and children.

The sides in this conflict are two Russian Republics—North Ossetia and Ingushetia and two autonomous Republics, South Ossetia and Georgia. Russia has been hesitant to get involved.

For generations, people have lived there together. There were many mixed families, many common traditions and customs. I personally believe that the conflict is the collision of different political groups, some call it the mafia, which consist mainly of men who are fighting for power in the region. To call it an “ethnic conflict” makes it sound too simple, too non-political.

Today, because of the violence and conflict, more than 15,000 people—both Ossetians and Russians—are homeless and are not safe. As a result of the fighting and the violence in the Vladikavkaz area in the six months between November 1992 and March 1993, more than 40,000 people have become refugees, 316 are lost, and 331 killed, among them 140 Ossetians and 179 Ingush. Almost 4000 houses have been burned and destroyed.

In this part of the world, I see bloodshed, people dying, mothers suffering, children as orphans. The cruelty and desire for revenge is growing. The pictures you see are of women and children. Women have been tortured with knitting needles, severed women’s heads were attached to armored personnel carriers, scalps are taken from people who are still alive, and women’s breasts are put on tanks.

These are the horrors that are the psychological reason for the growing conflict—an eye for an eye.

I believe the conflict in Ossetia could become another Yugoslavia, because regional politicians ignore each other’s positions as partners at peace negotiations. Common people do not understand why our leaders cannot do more to solve the conflict, when men are fighting, women are crying.

As a woman and a mother, I ask, “What are we teaching our future generation?”

A member of the Russian Union of Photographers from the republic of Ossetia, Kudryavtseva was documenting atrocities of the little-noticed conflict between northern Ossetia and the former republic of Chechnia-Ingush when she was taken prisoner by Ingush forces. She was later released in a prisoner exchange. She testified to the sufferings of women during wartime and displayed her slides and photographs of the carnage in Ossetia.
Slavica Kušić
Croatia

I am Slavica Kusic for the Center for Women War Victims. I have been active in work concerning violence
against women for five years, since the foundation of the SOS Hotline for battered women. I have also been
involved in a shelter for battered women from its beginning, as well as in helping found the Center for
Women War Victims. The Center for Women War Victims is a feminist, independent, alternative NGO which
provides refugee women psychological, social, legal, and humanitarian aid on the principles of self-help.

Their names are Meliha, Sadeta, Kristina. Their destinies are the same: exile. They flee with their
children and bundles to the unknown. I met them in the refugee camp in Karlovac. That is a
former military barrack turned into the home of women and children. On the walls of their
rooms they write their memories, they draw their houses. They note the names of the people
who maltreated them.

Last week I visited them, but many I could not find. They traveled to some other country
where they will wait to return to their homes. The military worked to paint the walls white
again; they scrape away the traces of memories. Everything is slowly forgotten. The
consciousness of the world is painted white. The world wants a clear conscience. I write
down many of these destinies in order to preserve them. The things that I read here are
just a small part of the horror that women and children go through in a war that continues.

Her name is Minka. She is fourteen years old. Not a woman, not a little girl. The horror that
she has experienced has made her face a stone mask. She watched out of the bushes,
where she was hiding with her mother and her brother, as her father was murdered. They
killed him and then cut him in pieces with a yard axe. When there was calm again in the
village, they emerged from the bushes to bury their father and then continued on foot into
the unknown. Now they are waiting for a third country to grant them exile, even if only
temporary. Minka wants to go back to her village to be present at a trial for war-criminals, because
she saw them and knows their names. She went to school with their children. One of the men was
her teacher.

On the next bed in the barracks was Hirzeta. She has not been able to sleep since she came to the
refugee camp. The nightmare that would haunt her in her sleep would be to go back to the place where she
left her four-month baby alive. She was fleeing from her village where her home was burning. She was
carrying her four-month-old twins in her arms, travelling by night and sleeping in the shelters of the second
World War. When her energy was finally drained, she was faced with the decision to die and therefore leave
her sons to die or to choose one and save him with all her remaining energy. She left the younger one, born
five minutes later, with a pacifier in his mouth and a note with his name on it. She said that she left him and
that Allah will help him. On that spot her memories stopped.

Hidajeta is a young mother of two. I have been helping for months to conceal her identity in the
refugee camp. Her sin was that she believed that by testifying against the atrocities in the detention camp
where she was held, she would help the world to discover how deep the crimes are, to stop them and to
punish the criminals. It happened that journalists sent her story around the world and left her to live or die
her life alone. She is hiding from the rage of other women who were together with her in the camp. The
world saw their stories, and the women realized the help of the world is nonexistent and their “shame” is
great. The surroundings further the shame of being raped. So they hid this “shame.” They don’t want to
admit they were raped or to give birth to their unwanted children.

I met Fikreta two weeks ago, immediately after her arrival in Karlovac. She fled her home last October.
On her way to Zagreb, she went through several detention camps. To be freed from the last one, she had to
pay for her freedom in German marks. The last one she was in was opened recently. But everyday, there are new women coming to it.

The Center for Women War Victims demands the following: first, that the war should be stopped and all detention camps closed; and second, that war criminals should be tried and punished. Those who started the war and those who carried out the atrocities themselves should be declared war criminals. Those who carried out the atrocities should be tried in the place where the crimes occurred because that is the only way that innocent people can live together again.

These four cases were enough to show that extreme violence in all dimensions against women was committed. Their physical and psychic integrity was violated and all their human and women's rights were violated. Their past is ruined and their future is uncertain.

Kusic works for the Center for Women War Victims, and has worked with women who have been victims of domestic violence. Kusic's work is focused on domestic violence situations which intensify in crisis situations when services for victims are scarce.
Lepa Mladjenović
Serbia

I come from Belgrade, the seat of the government which we believe started the war in Croatia and Bosnia, and which lead the massive genocide of the Muslim people. First of all, I would like to express my solidarity with all women of Muslim and Croat origin who are here, who are back in the war zones, or who have been forced to leave homes and are scattered around the world now, waiting for our letters.

I am one of a group in Belgrade who form the women's opposition to Serbian politics. I am one of the Women in Black Against the War which (from October 1991) stands on the streets of Belgrade to express our disagreement with the government and to show that we fight the violence against women on which this war is built. I am one of those from the SOS Hotline who formed a special group to work with women who survived sexual trauma in this war.

Working with women who come from Croat, Hungarian, Muslim, Gypsy, Albanian, and Serb backgrounds, we have seen that political decisions that are based on respect for difference are the only ones that can bring the change we work for. Since the government we belong to based most of its moves on hatred, revenge, and the desire for power, I am one of the group in Belgrade whose only position to the government is, "I accuse!"

Many of our days are filled with activities that deal with war. We search for candles and food cans for the packages to be sent to Sarajevo. We write letters to the Bosnian sisters out in Denmark, Sweden, and Holland, or help others to get there. When night comes, and the sound of the wind brings back the fear of the war out there, I fight depression with the urge to activate my despair.

I am caught between guilt and activism, between helplessness and the strength that comes out of the concrete work, between the complete impossibility of knowing the way out of the war and my deep feminist vision of the world. I need to say a few things that, together with my friends, I learned during this time of war.

First, in our encounters with women survivors of the war rapes, we have learned that women from all three nationalities have been raped, and that there are examples of systematic and individual rapes committed by all three sides. (We are looking for Albanian and Gypsy women from Bosnia who also must have been subjected to similar sexual violence. The women from the Jewish community in Sarajevo have mostly left the city at the beginning of the war.)

We have listened to our Bosnian sisters and heard their silence. We have heard their need for our solidarity. They speak out with their bodies. Some of them cannot say anything at all. Some of them were as young as fifteen years old. Some of them recognized soldiers as their neighbors. Some of them (Serbs) were systematically raped in Muslim, Croat soldiers' barracks. Some of them (Serbs) were raped by the soldiers of the same Serb nationality. Women of non-Serb origin (Muslim, Croat, mixed) raped by Serb soldiers, who came for abortions in Belgrade, felt horrible pressures, and were avoiding communicating with us, or we never met them at all. Some of them told us stories about other women who never survived. Most of them we met were pregnant, waiting for abortions or birth, and none of them we spoke with wanted the child. Some of them told us about women's solidarity across the nationalities.
Second, we have taken a position that, from the point of view of the survivors, there is no greater or lesser rape victim by definition. Each woman experiences trauma in her own way, and develops her own mechanisms of survival. Women of all nationalities in some cases do not have home or family to go back to. (The differences exist: women of Muslim origin without homes do not have a country of origin to refer to.) We have also taken a position not to divide women on the basis of nationalism, and not to count them according to their ethnic group. (Each government is already counting only their dead, their injured, their refugees, their raped women. Selective counting is the same logic of nation-state that led to the war.)

Third, after many discussions and exchanges of experience with many feminists from different countries, we have come to some hypotheses about war rape in Bosnia and Croatia:

a) We have all agreed that rape, any and every rape, is a violation of human rights. We have to work to change our legislative systems so that every one of the perpetrators will be punished (even though some do not believe in the present penal system at all, and believe that it should be based on different principles).

b) We have agreed that war rapes should be explicitly made a war crime, that the Geneva Convention should give this crime its full name, and that all governments and public and state institutions should know that this crime is to be punished, so that every single perpetrator-soldier (of all sides) will be put on trial.

c) We have finally learned that this war is another occasion in the history of genocide rapes. We are witnessing thousands of Muslim women being subjected to systematic rapes, death, and deportations as a part of the genocide military tactic (ethnic cleansing) of the Serbian Army. We therefore demand that genocide rape be named as such, and that political and military Serbian leaders be put on trial for these crimes.

d) We are witnessing many different misuses of the women raped in war. The Serbian government (and not only the Serbian) is using the fact of raped women to increase the hatred against the enemy and to rationalize their national chauvinism. Some journalists have been putting enormous pressure on women raped in war. They were using them to promote their media companies, conditioning them with money and other goods so that, in the emotional state they are in, some of the women were not able to refuse to provide testimony and afterwards suffered very much. Different state institutions manipulate numbers to such extent that one has an impression that they are glad to increase the numbers. They use these as weapons against the enemy, and they never point out the reality of male violence against women in their reports. Some men in Belgrade are in possession of video tapes with testimonies of Serbian women raped in war. They sell them for foreign currency.

Rape in the war in Bosnia is no longer the top issue of the world’s media. War rapes did not become a media issue because people were interested in protecting the women’s rights. But it is up to us now to use this break in the invisibility of rape in war and to enter all the institutional and legislative levels to censure male violence against women. It is up to us to continue our group work with women survivors in solidarity with each other’s pain, trauma, isolation, and loneliness. Because they told us how they escaped prisons and death by being helped by women of different nationalities, they taught us once again that solidarity can save our lives and that women’s solidarity is a force that men do not count on.
When talking about war crimes against women, one can only use lofty academic terms or the simple language of facts. Because I come from Bosnia-Herzegovina, from a country that has been bleeding to death for over a year, and in which extreme-fascist Serbs commit genocide on Bosnian Muslims, I am speaking about my own, hard reality.

I am from Zenica and am here to represent the Zenica Centre for the Registration of War and Genocide Crimes. I travelled with my team (together with representatives of the GbV and thanks to their mediation) to more than ten German towns, to Geneva, New York, and here to Vienna, where we met Simon Wiesenthal to whom we presented our documentation about the genocide of the Bosnian Muslims.

Because Zenica is the centre of the free Bosnian territory, the largest group of Bosnian-Herzegovinian refugees is located there. Approximately 80% of them are women. Of the former total of 2.4 million Muslims, only 750,000 now live in this country. 250,000 were killed and over one million were expelled and scattered all over the globe.

Our centre’s data bank contains documents on 20,000 “disappeared,” and 50,000 killed or injured children, 40,000 raped women, and also on 1,350 people strongly suspected of having committed war crimes. But these figures are not final. They are amended daily and are presently increasing rapidly. And they are not merely statistics. This information is based on testimonies of expellees who can be named.

We also presented this documentation to the Tribunal on the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Genocide which took place at the end of April 1993 in New York. After this event, we were unable to return home, because in the meantime, Bosnia-Herzegovina had become a concentration camp (also due to Croatian aggression).

In Bosnia’s centre and West Herzegovina, a puppet government of the Croatian president Tudjman was created: "Herzeg-Bosna." All communication lines were cut. My town, Zenica, is now shelled daily from both sides. Like many towns, it has become a large camp in which expelled women are living who survived the "ethnic cleansing," but who were raped and maltreated. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, systematic rapes are an element of genocide.

The aim is obvious: women will be destroyed and degraded. Women who have survived are injured and need a long time to be able to deal again with even a minimum of their customary daily normality. But approximately 40% of the women have not survived the maltreatment. They were horribly beaten and finally brutally killed. The Chetniks are not choosy. They indecently assaulted twelve-year-old girls and seventy-year-old women. Holocaust survivors reported these facts.

What will happen now after thousands of women have been killed? Will there be a tribunal in the case of those Chetniks of Draganovci near Kljuc, where they raped and finally shot sixty-year-old Krasulja Latitovic with a machine gun, in the presence of her husband, son, and the entire village? The whole village gave evidence about this crime.

Will there be a case against Mirko Lukic, a Kljuc Chetnik, whose entire army company raped Mrs. Omeragic in her own home, and who also rammed a rifle barrel into her womb? Mrs. Omeragic was later admitted to hospital, underwent surgery, and now lives in a room in the Zenica grammar school.

The video recordings of a twelve-year-old Foca girl, raped several times together with her thirty-year-old mother, were seen throughout the world. Both are now living in a Tarcin refugee camp.
In Bosnia-Herzegovina, every woman is now a war victim. Because of their children, mothers are under constant stress. It is a skill to survive—without electricity, water and basic food stuff—in a desperate effort to feed the family. Women who were working are now waiting. All production has been stopped or drastically reduced. Schools and universities are closed. Besides the population, this war is also destroying the education system. The schools are destroyed and used as refugee camps. In occupied areas, schools have become concentration camps in which mass rapes and maltreatment are on the daily agenda.

How do you think a mother feels whose children are unable to go to school? Since the beginning of the war, one school year has already passed. Our children live in cellars, if cellars exist. They cannot play any more, and they grow up prematurely. Who will be sentenced for this crime?

I turn to you, ladies and gentlemen judges, to ask UNESCO what it did in that year. Perhaps they thought that it was enough to survive physically, and that the intellect and the soul are unimportant. We are already placed on the level of animals in nature reserves in which we allegedly have international protection. Perhaps in these reserves, we will receive the kind of humanitarian aid in the future as we have received already—tinned food well past its date of use.

But Bosnia-Herzegovina's women will visit "survival schools" and teach their children that the first order of survival is defense and self-defense. For that we need arms. In this war, which affects us as women particularly hard, we have learned that such a tragedy must not be repeated. Like all people, we have the right to defend ourselves if we are attacked. But this fundamental right was taken away from us by the UN arms embargo.

We do not believe in negotiations any more. For us, they are only games in the cellars of the general staff that have continued for so long that the children of the raped women are already born. And please believe, during the course of this conference, hundreds of Bosnian-Herzegovinian women have been raped and killed, and thousands have been expelled from their villages and towns.

I must put it to you: is it not quite absurd that the UN, only one hour's flying time away from a member country in which the fundamental right of life is being violated, should hold a "Human Rights" conference?

Memisevic is a member of the Zenica Documentation Centre of War Crimes and is currently living in exile in Göttingen, Germany. Together with the Society for Endangered Peoples (Gfbv), she does civil rights work for her compatriots. She testified on war crimes against women in Bosnia/Herzegovina.
Aida Zaldgiz  
Bosnia/Herzegovina  
*translated from German by Ulrike Mann*

I am going to speak in German because it is a little bit easier for me when I'm nervous. I thought about what I should say on this occasion for a long time. When I heard Chin Sung Chung, such an emptiness entered my soul. What happened then, 25, 35, or 40 years ago, what happened in Japan, is happening right now. This testimony is about the drawing of blood. We have thousands of these testimonies.

I am going to tell you how things got started for me. In August, I went with my friend to Zagreb to see what was happening in my city, in my country, and how to help. Sitting in a street cafe, we met friends from Sarajevo, and they told us that in Zagreb, lying in a hospital, was a sixteen-year-old girl far advanced in her pregnancy. She had been in a rape camp for four months.

The friend then asked us, since we were from Germany where there is money, if we could arrange to buy a dressing gown, underwear, and a pair of bathing slippers for the girl. Her name was Mesada. We took all the money we had with us and went to the first department store. In this department store, I went to the ladies' department and took a pink dressing gown, size 36. My friend said it was too big. I couldn't imagine that it could be too big. She said, “Ah, you don't understand. She is small.” So we bought all the things for the girl in the children's department. She was then six months pregnant.

In November, I once again went to Zagreb with the “Mona Lisa” program and met with other women. We created an information program, so that the world's public would do something about the situation—as we were hoping back then.

Aziza and her two children, a boy and a daughter of twelve years, were held in a concentration camp. She was raped and even burned. The thing that she wanted to hide was that her twelve-year-old daughter was also raped.

By then, we had already started with our group. In the group, there was a beautiful girl named Susanne. Susanne was the daughter of a Serb mother and a Muslim father. When the human rights violations, these horrible things done to Muslims in every place happened, she resisted. Therefore, she was taken with her younger sister to a rape camp.

Now, in Zagreb, we are dealing with a woman. Her name is Ayse. I got to know her at the hospital. She was eight months pregnant. She has a daughter. Her daughter's name is Slata, which means “golden.” She doesn't know what happened to her daughter. She felt she would go crazy, that she was half crazy. She said that she would give the child away, she didn't want to have anything to do with it, and so forth. And then, when she delivered, the child was born dead. I talked to her and she was really depressed. I tried to tell her that somehow she really didn't want it. But she responded, “Aida, I carried it for nine months under my heart.” That was probably the moment where I myself didn't know.

I want to tell you also—I am going to be very brief, because there is a lot of sorrow in this world and with such sorrow we have to start doing something about it—that at this moment, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, every 1.7 seconds, a Bosnian Muslim woman, or a Bosnian Serb woman, or a Bosnian Croat woman, but the emphasis on Bosnian, is raped. You can calculate for yourselves how many there have been while I am talking here.

We are always talking about the victim, and all of us avoid naming the perpetrator. It is against the perpetrator that we have to fight. The perpetrator—do I really have to say this?—is the Serbian soldier.
My name is Grazya. I am 30 years old and I come from Poland. I used to work in the ship-building industry, but since the so-called "revolution" there is no more work for me. The economic crisis has turned my life upside down. I am divorced, and I have two children.

In September 1991, I was working in a restaurant in Yugoslavia, and had just come to the end of my contract. Through some acquaintances, I met a man, John C. He asked me whether I was interested in going to work in a restaurant in Germany, where I would earn three times as much as in Yugoslavia for the same kind of work. I was interested because the situation in Yugoslavia was becoming more and more unstable. A few days later, he introduced me to another man, Robert, who said that he was the manager of a restaurant in Germany. It was agreed that I would work as kitchen help and that I would be paid a salary between DM1500 and DM1800 per month. A few days later, Robert came with two other men to fetch me. There was another woman with him who was also going to work in Germany. At the border with Germany, I had to give him my passport because he somehow convinced me that it was better if he was the one to hand it to the immigration officers. He never gave it back to me afterwards.

On the way, we stopped at a hotel somewhere in Germany. Robert and one of the men, Mario, stayed there with me, and the other man went with the other woman somewhere else. There, they told me that I had to work as a prostitute. I protested, but to no effect. When I kept on refusing, Mario raped me while Robert took photographs. He threatened to send the photographs to my mother if I continued to resist. I became very frightened after that. I was afraid that my mother, being a staunch Roman Catholic, would have a heart attack if she saw those photos. Then we drove on to Essen. There, I was sold to a third man, Josef. Later I discovered that Robert had received DM3000 from Josef for me. Josef brought me to the Netherlands. I did not see the other woman again.

In the Netherlands, I was forced to work as a prostitute in a "window," in a street full of "prostitute windows." They brought a big, dark man to me and said that he would watch me all the time as I worked, so I should not think that I could escape. They also said that it was no use going to the police, because they were paying the police too. I had to earn at least 600 guilders per day. If I did not earn enough, I was beaten. They beat me on the head and kicked me in the belly. I still suffer pain from this mistreatment. They showed me guns and said that they would not hesitate to use them if I did not cooperate. They would throw my body in the canal and no one would be able to identify me.

I was terrified. I was sometimes allowed to keep some money. Then, I sent the money to my mother and children in Poland, but did not dare to tell them of my predicament. After I had been working a few
Lap-Chew is co-founder and staff worker of the Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV) in the Motherlands. She has been involved in direct assistance work, and campaigning for 10 years in support of women who have survived being forced to work as prostitutes in the Netherlands. She presented the experience of a Polish woman who escaped and tried to obtain judicial redress.

weeks under close guard, there appeared to be a chance to escape. A customer seemed to like me. I asked him for help. After some hesitation, he finally helped me to escape and took me to his apartment. Two weeks later, a furious Josef appeared on the doorstep. The customer who helped me became afraid and let me go. From then on, I was guarded even more closely and was not allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied. I pretended submission, and worked and laughed in the hope that my captors would relax their guard and that I could avoid any more physical assaults. I was still determined to escape. Finally, it worked. In an unguarded moment, I fled without knowing where to go.

On a street, I tried to ask an old couple for help. But they didn’t understand me. I spoke to another woman passerby but she too did not understand me. But at least she understood that I was Polish. As luck would have it, she had a Polish neighbor. The neighbor understood my story. The woman allowed me to sleep in her house that night. The next day, she brought me to a center for asylum-seekers near her house because I told her I was afraid to go home. There, the staff helped me to apply for asylum. I was interviewed by the contact officer for the Ministry of Justice. I told him how I had come to the Netherlands, how I was forced to work as a prostitute. I told him I was afraid to return to Poland because I feared that the traffickers might take revenge on me for running away, and also because of the compromising photos that Josef had made and would send to my mother. But the Ministry of Justice decided that I did not fulfill the criteria for recognition as a political refugee, and rejected my request for asylum.

Luckily, my lawyer recognized that I was actually a victim of trafficking. He contacted the Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV). They explained the laws against trafficking in the Netherlands; they told me what my rights were as a victim of trafficking and that I could press charges against the traffickers. Since I had nothing more to lose, and I was terrified that Robert and Josef would still keep on looking for me, I decided to press criminal charges. STV contacted the anti-vice police, but strangely to me, the police did not believe me. They thought I had made up the charge of trafficking after my asylum request had been rejected, so that I could stay in the Netherlands. They could not understand why I had not filed the trafficking charges in the first place.

Again I was fortunate. In another city, the woman with whom I had been brought to Germany had also been brought to the Netherlands and had also filed charges against Josef and Robert. The police in that town had contacted STV for assistance for her. Finally, with these two charges, my case was taken seriously. This gave me some sense of security, and it also meant that I would be allowed to stay in the Netherlands until the case had been tried in court and all judicial procedures were ended. I was relieved because I felt safer in the Netherlands than in Poland.

But my relief was short lived. On the basis of the two charges, Josef had actually been arrested, but through a procedural mistake he was released. Robert was never found. After some time, my case was dismissed for lack of evidence and I would have to leave the Netherlands. Meanwhile, my mother had informed me that “some strange people” had visited her and were asking where I was. How could I go back, what could I do? Fear and desperation overcame me, and I broke down. STV and my lawyer are helping me to obtain a residence permit for the Netherlands on humanitarian grounds, but it will take months, maybe years for a decision. Meanwhile, I miss my children and family.

Lin Lap-Chew: Grazyna’s experience is typical for most of the 400 women we have assisted over the 6 years we have been working. There are at least 5000 women who have been trafficked into the Netherlands—but nobody knows how many women have victimized in this way in the whole of Europe, in America, all over the world. Thank you for listening to Grazyna.
Before I start my testimony, I just want to say that it is not easy to stand here and testify on this particular issue, because it is a very difficult and controversial issue, and it is very emotional as well. When we speak about it in our countries, we often are harassed and silenced. I had to leave my country because I couldn't live there anymore. I felt silenced, this time not necessarily by oppressive governments, but by oversensationalization, by that feeling of shame that many people make us feel when they view this issue in isolation from the rest of women's oppression, which makes us very defensive about wanting to open our true feelings about this issue. But I went through a whole process of questioning myself—am I allowing others to harass me again and keep me from speaking up for myself and for the women in Africa because they don't understand? So, with that resolution, I decided to speak up for the women in Africa.

I stand here today to testify on behalf of many girls and women who had no choice when parts of their bodies were removed in the name of culture and social conformity. I also testify for all the women in all cultures, East and West, who undergo the physical pain and psychological agony of bodily manipulations to conform to the prevailing social requirement of femininity. We are all, as women, made to do some things to ourselves that we don't really want to do just to conform and be accepted as women. In my society, that means cutting off essential parts of the genitals of women. And because they are women, their fate is to marry, give their husbands sexual pleasure, and give birth to many children while suffering in silence, obedience, and acceptance.

Because as women we are made economically and socially powerless, most of us have little chance to say "no" to stop the injustices imposed on us by society. But today, many of us have found our voices and are speaking out against a custom that abuses and humiliates us. We have been silenced for a long time in the name of culture and the preservation of tradition. We will no longer be intimidated by accusations of disrespect to our culture.

Our cultures are already changing very rapidly, and not always in positive ways. We love our cultures, and much of what we inherited was positive, but we must be honest and admit the negative aspects. Today, our traditional ways are being undermined by materialism and greed, which seem to be embraced with little objection. And nobody questions when they import all the materialistic aspects of the Western world to our societies; nobody questions whether this is right or wrong, or whether it is undermining tradition.

Why is it, I ask, why is it only when women want to bring about change for their own benefit that culture and custom become sacred and unchangeable? I want to say that culture belongs to us, too. We, the women, we too have the right to decide what parts of our culture we want to preserve and what we want to abandon.

I want to read to you some of the voices of African women, because I don't think this is just my voice as an individual. We have many times been challenged that this issue is not the concern of African women, but through reading some of the voices of African women, I think we can show that many African women and men have stood up and protested against this practice. Listen to the voices of African women:

I was circumcised in 1960 at the age of 11. I remember every detail of the operation and the worst part was when the wound became infected. When I was 18, it was the turn of my younger sister. I was totally against her circumcision. My father wanted the milder type (the clitoridectomy) but my mother insisted on the severer type (the infibulation). Eventually, my sister had the intermediate
type, virtually the same as infibulation. The suffering of my sister made me hate circumcision even more than my own earlier experience.

That was Dr. Asma El Dareer, a Sudanese physician who turned her anger into positive action, and conducted the first national survey on the prevalence of genital mutilation in Sudan. She wrote a book about it called *Women, Why Do You Weep?*

Listen to Assitan Dialo, a woman activist from Mali:

Now, what is the justification for female circumcision? They think it diminishes sexual desire, so that means you will be faithful. They also say that female circumcision purifies women, and that means that our sex genitalia is dirty...To them, female circumcision is very necessary to support their view of women's sexuality.

To justify this gross social injustice, we have been told for years that it is part of being a good woman, and that it is a sacred requirement of religion. We now know better. We know that it is not sacred, and that it has nothing to do with any religion. Neither Islam, Christianity, nor Judaism mention female circumcision in their texts, although followers of all three religions and others practice it.

Raqiya Haji Abdalla of the Somali Women's Democratic Organization says about female genital mutilation:

Women are victims of outdated customs, attitudes, and male prejudice. This results in negative attitudes of women about themselves. There are many forms of sexual oppression, but this particular one is based on the manipulation of women's sexuality in order to assure male domination and exploitation. The origins of such practices may be found in the family, society, and religion.

I will also read to you the words of Asma Abdel Halim, a human rights lawyer and Islamic scholar from Sudan who is among us here. She calls for a feminist re-interpretation of religion to deal with this issue. She says:

With regards to female circumcision, it is important that there be a final religious announcement clearly stating that it is a form of mutilation and therefore forbidden. It is not sufficient for religion to shun the practice. Religion should be used as a tool for condemning and preventing its occurrence. The participation of women in the reinterpretation of religion will be crucial.

One of the arguments that also gets thrown at us is that this is a private issue that should not be brought into the public. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is not a private issue nor a concern of one nation. It affects around 100 million women who live in 26 African countries, a few minorities in some Asian countries, and immigrants in Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Every year, around two million girls are at risk of being subjected to this cruel and unnecessary tradition. Their health is at risk and their lives afterwards will never be the same.

For those who claim that female genital mutilation is only an issue for elite women, like myself, I invite you all to come and sit with me in the outpatient Obstetrics and Gynecology department of Khartoum Hospital, where I worked for many years. Hundreds of thousands of women pass through that clinic. They complain of chronic, vague complaints metaphorically related to their pelvis area because they cannot mention their genitals. They complain of headache, fatigue, loss of sleep, backache, and many other vague symptoms. You sit with these women and listen to them speaking in monotonous depressed voices; don't dismiss them but try to really listen. Probe them a little, and the psychological pain and anxiety over their genitals, their sexual lives, their fertility (which has been jeopardized by this operation, but is also an essential part of their lives), and all the other complications of their circumcision will come flooding at you. The pain is unbelievable, just sitting and listening to them. These women are holding back a silent scream, a silent anger, so strong it could shake the earth. Instead, it is held back, depleting their energy and draining their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Meanwhile, the medical establishment, in which I was trained, treats them as malingerers and a burden on health resources.
I will read to you the testimony of one such woman from another country. Her name is Miami:

The memory of their screams calling for mercy, gasping for breath, pleading that those parts of their bodies that it pleases God to give them be spared. I remember the fearful look in their eyes when I led them to the toilet, "I want to but can't. Why Mum? Why did you let them do this to me?" Those words continue to haunt me. My blood runs cold whenever the memory comes back. It is now four years after the operation and my children still suffer from its effects. How long must I live with the pain that society imposes on me and my children?

This was Miami, a mother with two daughters, from Gambia.

We hold that female genital mutilation violates the rights of girl children, and since the effects last for life and are irreversible, it also violates the rights of women. As the practice stands to date, it is mostly forced on children with or without their consent. This practice is not chosen by women. True choice can only be exercised if a person is above the age of consent. We therefore submit that genital mutilation is a violation of the following Human Rights Treaties:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. The Convention to Eliminate all Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Already, the World Health Organization and other United Nations bodies have declared genital mutilation a health hazard and have called for its abolition. Also, most of the governments in the countries concerned have publicly condemned the practice. We demand that more active steps be taken to make the action effective:

1. FGM and other cultural practices that interfere with women’s bodies and personal integrity must be stated as a violation of human rights in the relevant conventions, and all concerned governments must be persuaded to ratify them.
2. All professional organizations must pronounce it unethical for any of their members to undertake circumcision of a girl under the age of consent. They must help train their members on how to provide safe, supportive, and respectful health services for women who already have been circumcised.
3. International health and development agencies, as well as national governments, must commit funds to programs to educate and counsel people against the mutilation of women.
4. At the appropriate time and in consultation with women’s groups and national human rights and legal bodies, laws should be passed to prohibit the practice.

Finally, I want to say that we all understand that genital mutilation is not the only suffering women endure in our communities. Women are the ones who suffer most from lack of political freedom, civil wars, structural adjustment policies, poverty, famine, disease, etc. But women’s issues are always pushed to the background because they are not priority issues, because there are “more pressing” issues. Besides their general suffering, women carry the burden of social and family violence. In the name of social harmony and national priorities, women’s suffering is always dismissed as too personal and unimportant, and therefore not worthy of public attention. We say no national struggle can be successful without the participation of women in economic, political, and social development. But women must be allowed to participate as whole beings, and no part of their suffering can be compromised or sacrificed. Women’s issues must become national issues and be part of global human rights concerns. Female Genital Mutilation is an urgent and serious concern for millions of women and it can no longer be ignored or postponed. We must act on it now.
My name is Johanne. I come from Canada. I think it will be difficult to fit my past five years of testimony into a ten minute testimony.

On August 5, 1988, a friend and I decided to go out together. He came to my house and we had a beer. He suggested I take some medication to help calm me down. At that time I was going through a difficult personal situation and I was stressed. I felt the effect of the medication right after I took it, so I asked him what he had given me. He laughed and told me to relax. After that moment I don't remember anything. People told me that we went to many bars. We went back to my place, and it was when he started to shove me that I realized I was in danger. He sexually violated me and he struck me on the head and back. My neighbors called the police and they stopped my attacker. I was taken to the hospital in an ambulance. This was the beginning of my nightmare.

I was in a state of shock. I had a lot of pain. I had bruises all over my back and pelvis. I remained at the hospital for two days for observation. Two weeks passed before the shock wore off. I realized what had happened and decided to place a formal complaint. And the nightmare continued.

Since they could not provide me with protection 24 hours a day, I decided to leave the region. And still, today, I live in fear because my aggressor was acquitted and he continues to harass me. The trial was kept pending for one and a half years. The judges were changed five times, for reasons I don't know. I had to give my testimony three times, and three times I had to relive the attack. I was humiliated. I was judged because of my physical appearance—tall, thin, young, pretty. The defense lawyer tried many times to discredit my testimony, saying that because I was under the effects of alcohol I could not provide credible testimony.

All the while I was continually suffering medical treatment for my permanently damaged back. In fact, I was lying in a hospital bed undergoing treatment at the moment of the verdict. He was acquitted. They prevented me from seeing the results of the trial.

Once more I was a victim.

And the nightmare continues with the physical, psychological, and financial damages, as well as the end of many of my dreams—to have children, to be married, to have a career, to be independent. Also, the frustration about my physical condition after suffering operation after operation, all within an atmosphere of indifference by the medical personnel. My physical condition continues to deteriorate.

I need to face the reality: I am permanently handicapped. I will be dependent on others for the rest of my life. I must live with these frustrations every day. For example, in order to come here to Vienna, I was on the plane for twelve hours and could not get myself to the restroom. People move me around like a bag of potatoes on the airplane, on the bus. Even here, after three days, people finally started to notice me. Every day I must suffer chronic pain.

I am a victim, but I am trying to become a survivor, to find a new meaning for my life. It is the reason I am here in front of you. Back home in my region, I used to go to the schools to talk about the unacceptable situation of violence against women and to remind them that what happened to me could happen to them.

Our governments must take the responsibility to make violence against women a human rights issue. Our judicial systems cannot permit other women to share the same nightmare I had. I know that in Canada we have a new law on sexual assault that does not allow the courts to discredit the woman's testimony because of the effects of alcohol. But I remain in my wheelchair, all because I said a small word of three letters to a man—Non.
Rebeca Sevilla  
Peru  

I come from a male chauvinistic country. In general, it is a very difficult process to identify myself with the word lesbian—to be able to ignore the pejorative context of this word.  

I come to give a testimony about the difficulties, persecutions, and the situations that affect our lives as lesbian women. I am going to talk in order to make visible the situation that affects many absent sisters and many who are present here today.  

We have three basic alternatives: to be a daughter, a mother, or a wife. In terms of being a daughter, it was very hard for me to leave my mother's house without being married. I felt guilty to have left my mother and to have not become a mother myself. Sometimes, I think about having a child. Maybe I will adopt one. In terms of being a wife, it has never interested me and, also, I have a very critical opinion about marriage.  

When I was 23, I had my first relationship with a woman. We stayed together no longer than three months. It was very hard for me. When it was over, I tried to forget, as if it were a mistake in my life. I decided to go to a therapist to ask for help, and I then started to look for a boyfriend. But it was not a matter of attraction—I just did not want one. I forced myself for many years to be someone that I was not and did not want to be. It was a difficult situation and I could not share it with anyone.  

I then resumed having relationships with women. But I still have not resolved the reality of my situation. Simple things like introducing someone as my girlfriend, taking her hand in a public area, and expressing affection are difficult for me, and for all lesbians, to do. I worry that it will hurt my mother, our mothers, friends, and coworkers.  

I recognize that for many years I lived a secret, lying to myself like many other women. I was afraid to lose opportunities in my studies and my job, afraid of being rejected by my family and friends, or even by my girlfriend's family.  

In every part of the world, there exist women who love women. Our need for affection and communication has been reported for many years. But, as a strategy for survival, we have lived clandestine lives or in anonymity. Society does not allow us to express our thoughts and our feelings, or to act in a free way. It is also the case that some lesbians do not know about the existence of other lesbians, and they do not have any other option besides sexual and emotional isolation.  

Women who raise any suspicions about their lesbian identity are victims of domestic abuse, extortion, or they are threatened with the loss of custody of their children.  

Many times lesbians, homosexuals, and other sexual minorities are considered “sick” persons who need a “treatment” to become “normal” again. Our mental health is exposed to strong emotional tension due to daily negative and extreme social repression. In some countries, this violence is institutionalized. In China, lesbians are submitted to forced shock therapy.  

We, as lesbians, are victims of persecution, coercion, and illegal arrest. Our personal security is constantly threatened. In some countries, the incidence of violence and murder related to sexual preference is extremely high. In Brazil, data collected by a homosexual organization in Bahia shows that, over the past ten years, 2,000 murders were registered. This is only a partial number since the information is restricted to cases reported by the media. In 90% of the analyzed cases, the crimes have not been resolved and the aggressor remains free. Out of the total number, 187 were crimes against lesbians.  

Marly’s case is an example of this impunity granted to aggressors against lesbians. She is from the city of Maceio. In 1983, she was violated with a bottle and killed along with her lover, Rita da Silva. The aggressor was a member of her family and he remains free. It is only one of the faces of this “social cleansing” that
results in the physical extermination of lesbians, homosexuals, prostitutes, and street-kids. In all these types of crimes, the majority of perpetrators go unpunished.

In our society, we have a bad habit of not calling things by their name. Because of this conservative attitude, the lack of information and respect for different ways of life threatens the right of women to live. Where they confer "existence permits," where they don't realize we are lesbians, where they don't see our rights as human rights, where we don't have control of our bodies and our lives, where we don't have access to economic independence—they deny women recognition of their humanity.

Despite the changes that have come towards the end of the twentieth century, forced heterosexuality remains the only role for women that is valued by the society. In terms of sexual politics, we live in a totalitarian regime where only one female model is respected.

We demand and claim the right to control our bodies. We want to have the right to live with dignity. We want to be able to organize our families with children in liberty. We also want to organize as lesbians to enjoy our capacity to love.

I do not think that what we demand is outrageous. Most people would consider it reasonable if they used common sense.

We demand that the officials high up in their buildings use common sense, and recognize the reality that lesbians exist and that it is not possible to keep denying that we don't. To disagree with our lifestyle is one thing, but to discriminate against us and deny our rights is another. I believe there is a difference between disagreement and discrimination.
I come from Nicaragua, a small country in its geography but big in its friendship with other countries. I used to work as an aide in an infirmary until the tragic day of March 3, 1986. On this day, in order to save my life and the life of my unborn baby, I was given anaesthesia in my spinal column. This is a normal anaesthesia applied in every country called epidural anaesthesia, and it is used to obtain a regional neural block in the body. Since March 3, my life is changed. Eight days after the anaesthesia, I started to have strong pain in my spinal column. The doctors just said that it was a normal reaction to the anaesthesia. Two months later, I started to fall down all the time, for no reason. This process continued for four years until I ended up confined to this wheelchair.

On July 1, 1987, I went to Cuba with a group of other women who were in the same situation as I, and also with a group of teachers of the anaesthesiology department from the Hospital Escuela de León. We went there to investigate the suspicions about our cases. We were subjected to many exams, including a computerized tomography which detected an inflammation on the spinal cord caused by the effects of chemicals.

We then were sent back to Nicaragua to recover. But recovery was impossible due to the lack of sophisticated means necessary for our treatment. Besides that, the top authorities from the health ministry of the country would not help us. Our rights were violated from the moment the doctors injected expired medications into our bodies. As a result, we were forced to lose many rights we have as women and as human beings.

In this wheelchair, I am always dependent on a generous or responsible person who knows the meaning of solidarity or humanity. The number of victims of improper and unsafe medical treatment in Nicaragua is not known, since it is not always reported to the health authorities. We believe the number of cases not reported to be around 500. It is not an exact number because, as in other countries, rural areas are undercounted and under-reported. From the rural areas, women seeking help at the health clinics are often subjected to operations which result in similar permanent damage. Many of them, due to ignorance or lack of opportunity or information, do not report the negative results of their operations.

A study by a Swedish agency gave a number of approximately 600 to 2000 cases of this kind of paralysis in Nicaragua. Despite the fact that this situation has persisted for ten years, the Nicaraguan government and the international health community has failed to fulfill its role. These paralysis cases are not seriously investigated, and as a result, we still do not know the cause of them. The medical reasons given for our condition are inadequate hygiene procedures, the use of contaminated syringes, or the use of expired medications. But the real cause was inadequate people— as we all know. Nicaragua suffered a blockade, and the people who worked in the health centers were working with little other than their bare hands. The result was contamination of the anaesthesia.

Sisters, I have reported to you in this way, but please do not think that it was only Petrona who spoke to you. It is in the voices of hundreds of women who are affected by improper medical procedures in Nicaragua that I speak. I also speak today to alert all the nations of the world that our rights, as women, will not continue to be violated. It is not only that my right to proper medical attention has been violated, but as women, our rights are violated for the rest of our lives. For example, we have lost our privilege, our right, to have more children since our spines can no longer support a pregnancy. We have lost the right to work with...
dignity. Many of us were professionals before our spinal injuries, and today we are not wanted anywhere. We are single mothers, since in many cases the husband abandons his wife after she is confined to a wheelchair. And society places us behind walls where we do not have any opportunity to integrate with others. We feel like parasites.

My country is governed by a woman, as you know. And ironically, despite the fact that she also suffers by being handicapped, we, the handicapped women, continue to be the most marginalized and abandoned group.

You must be tired. I hope to have touched the hearts of all the international community here today. Like today, we will keep struggling against the violation of our rights. And one of the principle rights for women is the right to safe reproductive health care. The question is, who is responsible for this crime? Is it the health ministry of Nicaragua, the doctors, or the international company who sold expired products to poor countries as an experiment?

To end, I ask for your solidarity with handicapped women in our fight to demand recognition of our existence as women wronged by a discriminatory system. We have demanded just compensation from the health ministry, but we have not received an answer. We have also demanded medical treatment and the provision of adequate means to recover.

Well, in the name of all my friends who are also handicapped, and in the name of all the Nicaraguan women who, in one way or another, have had their rights violated, I say that the struggle against the violation of our rights has only started.

Founder of the Association of Disabled Women of León,
Sandoval is one of hundreds of Nicaraguan women permanently disabled by the misuse of an epidural anaesthetic applied during Caesarean births. She testified on medical violence within the health system, and the failure of the government and international medical community to investigate and correct these unacceptable violations of women's reproductive rights.
testimonies on social and economic rights

Maria Lourdes de Jesus
Cape Verde/Italy

As of today, the story of the so-called Third World migration to Italy has been analyzed as male migration. The statistics, though, reveal that 50% of these are women, and a good part of these migrants come from Africa, the majority of whom are working as domestic helpers. Because of the kind of work they do, these women have been defined as "invisible women."

I would like to relate some part of my own story as a migrant woman. I am sure that every person who has migrated has experienced injustice through violation of her rights. I first migrated to Lisbon, Portugal at the age of 12, when my mother thought that to help, I must follow what my other compatriots have done. “For a better life,” she said, but it was not like that.

Using my minor status as an excuse, my pay was very low, although I was working like an adult. All the while I was sending money to my mother. I was exploited, working as a domestic helper with a family for three long years.

The second attempt to improve our living condition was the opportunity to migrate to Italy. That time, the proposal came directly from my elder sister, who had been living and working there. I had a working contract that served as a guarantee. Everything was in writing and appeared to be in order: my pay, rest hours, social contribution, holidays, etc. Everything seemed in order. The only doubt I had was that the contract was valid for one year, and I could not change my employer or the type of work I could do. But I did not attach too much importance to these concerns. After all, I had with me my sister and co-nationals.

I soon found out that the only things which were respected in my working contract were those aspects I had had doubts about—that I couldn’t change my employer or my work. None of my rights were ever respected, and soon I also discovered that many of my co-nationals were living under the same conditions, some of them in even worse situations. When I began to understand these injustices, I started to be interested in our problems and in organizing migrant workers from my country.

After some more years, working contracts could no longer require any worker to remain with the same employers for one year. But this type of exploitation (violation of the rights and respect of persons) increased. It is difficult to document the violations for various reasons, including the fact that many violations occur within private homes where migrant women fear losing jobs, or are ashamed and embarrassed to talk about experiences which they would prefer to forget.

One Cape Verdean woman was only able to avoid being sexually harassed by her Italian employer by locking herself inside the bathroom; she escaped in the middle of the night when he was sleeping. There are also cases where women suffer sexual assaults in silence to avoid being fired from work. Others who were not able to endure the abuse were forced to leave their jobs.
Another situation of exploitation is the trafficking of young African women for prostitution. These young women do not control their lives; they work as prostitutes under miserable conditions, and receive only some money out of their earnings from the pimps.

Most migrant women are employed as domestic workers. This work involves several serious limitations to freedom. A domestic worker has only two afternoons free per week, yet she cannot choose the days she wants to be free. There are scarce opportunities for her to interact with the society in which she lives. She has few opportunities to establish social relationships or to give a sense of continuity to her life. Language problems and self-expression lead to difficulties for her in communicating with others. Limitations to personal intimacy and the lack of an autonomous living space for domestic workers lead to a sense of frustration and the sublimation of affective needs. They also lead to the impossibility of living with her family, with a husband/partner and children. A domestic worker experiences problems of low self-esteem, which causes her not to believe in her capacity to improve herself and her relationships with others. This attitude of resignation in confronting her own condition often leads her to fall into self-victimization, constructing a protective barrier separating her from her external reality, thereby making it difficult for her to find solutions to her problems.

African women in Europe suffer a triple discrimination: living in a continent where women are not emancipated and where power is dominated by men; as foreigners who find difficulty in having their rights respected; and simply for the color of their skin.

My testimony continues. I will stop out of respect for the others who will still have to testify. Thank you.

de Jesus is an African immigrant woman who lives in Italy. She is president of the Cape Verdian Women’s Organization and a member of the Akina Mama wa Afrika. Formerly a domestic worker, de Jesus testified to the violations of migrant women’s human rights because of their gender, race, class and lack of access to services which leaves women with no protection from abuse.
I would like to extend my thanks to the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, the Asian Women Human Rights Council, and UNIFEM for making possible my participation in this historic event.

I come here as an indigenous woman from the Kankanaey ethnolinguistic group in the Cordillera of northern Philippines. The Cordillera is the ancestral home to a million indigenous peoples collectively called Igorots.

Igorots consider wife battery as a public crime which can be resolved in the indigenous socio-political structures like the dap-ay (which, unfortunately, is the council of male elders) or can be included in the charter of the inter-village peace pacts (bedong). Wife battery merits banishment, divorce, the breaking of the peace pact, or severe fines and an oath not to do it again under pain of banishment. That is why there had been very rare cases of domestic violence in our traditional societies. However, these systems are slowly losing their usefulness as villages are integrated into the market economy, as christianization proceeds, and as the state imposes a legal system which does not recognize customary law as part of jurisprudence. Thus, increasingly, the support available to Igorot women is slowly being eroded, leaving them more and more vulnerable as cases of domestic violence increase. The cases of domestic violence we see now are occurring among younger couples and among women married to non-indigenous persons, like myself.

In the latter case, cultural differences play a major role in conflicts between partners. In my culture, women are seen more for their reproductive function than as sex objects. However, among the lowlanders, who have fully assimilated into the western culture, and especially for my partner who grew up in a community near a U.S. military base, women are seen more as sex objects. Behaviors which to me are normal, like going out into the yard without a bra (because it is a western contraption) even if there are males, elicits violence.

This violence has cost me a lot. Ten years ago, I left a promising teaching career in the university because I felt I could not be an effective teacher. Who would want to have a teacher who is sporting a black eye, or whose jaws have become the color of eggplant due to battering? Who would want to employ somebody who is absent when needed because she has to take time to heal herself?

As feminist activists, we must look into the socio-economic dimensions of gender violence. How many opportunities have been passed up by us victims because physically, mentally and psychologically we cannot go to work? How many contributions have been lost because we had to take time out to heal ourselves? It is degrading to go to work with a lot of injuries to your body.

In addition to my own personal experience, I also would like to share what is happening to my indigenous sisters in the Cordillera, the Philippines, and even Asia. The Igorot women are, as are other indigenous women, the main food producers in our communities. In villages which are marginalized, neglected, and poor, this role is very important as we have to ensure the food supply in the community. This role revolves around our relationship with the land, from which we have evolved our cultures. Land is life to us. It is the women who nurture the land in order to derive life from it. To remove us from our land is to kill our being indigenous. This is what is happening to us.

The government is implementing its Total War Policy in our ancestral territories. We are being bombed, starved, killed. We are hamletted in places we cannot call home. We are forced to leave our homes, fields, and worship places. We cannot go to our fields and swiddens because we might get killed, raped, molested,
or harassed, because a curfew has been imposed on us (we cannot work the farms when there is a curfew),
or because our crops have been destroyed by the bombs, bullets or helicopters landing on our fields.

When we go out to get food outside our villages, we are subjected to food and medicine blockades. At
military checkpoints, “extra” food and medicines are confiscated. The military and paramilitary determine
what is “enough” to bring home.

Women’s organizations, including barrio health committees which are female dominated, are harassed
as guerrilla fronts, and are ordered to be dismantled. Socio-economic projects, like village cooperatives run
by women with as little as US$10 in capital, have to suspend operations, or else what little goods they have
will be confiscated. Training and education activities to empower women have to be canceled.

Women leaders are summoned for military interrogation and visited several times in their homes to
explain why they are linking up with NGOs. After three months, they undergo the same routine because of
change of command.

When we visit interior villages, we must get “safe conduct” passes from the military which does not
ensure our safety. In one village, we had to pay a courtesy call to the military detachment and not to the
civilian officials. In another, we had to sign in and out of the village, with many restrictions on our mobility.

We have also documented and published cases of rape, gang rape, attempted rape, and sexual
molestation by military and paramilitary personnel. There are also the women and children who are
abandoned after the military operations. Premature delivery, bleeding, psychosis, and other forms of trauma
among women and children have also been documented.

In our experience, militarization and so-called development come together. Because of militarization,
we cannot perform the rituals for many events in our life cycle that provide us with the confidence to meet
the challenges of life. These include rites for birthing, illnesses, disturbances, community solidarity, and many
others. We cannot invoke our goddesses and gods for a good harvest that will see us through until next
harvest time. This we cannot do because we are removed from our worship places and the land by which we
identify our existence on this earth. Our jars and beads, which thread our life, are stolen or broken. This
is ethnocide.

This is because we have conserved our resources through the ages through our environmentally-sound
resource management practices. Our territories are now all that is left to be tapped by government and big
business. We are being asked to sacrifice in the name of “development,” development for the so-called
majority, the government, the transnationals and the international financing institutions. This is development
aggression. It is precisely because of the Igorots’ defense of their ancestral domain from Spanish exploitation
that these resources are intact.

The government is arming our men, and some women and children, in order to create conflict among
us and do harm to us. This has brought tragic tribal, community, and family conflicts with the one who
wields the gun prevailing over the others. Give the gun to a misfit and it will be misused.

Take the case of Delia. Delia Mangay-ayam was a 24-year-old teacher in the provincial center. On
February 3, 1991, four men entered her home and robbed her. They dragged Delia out and serially raped her.
She was able to identify one attacker, which led to his arrest. Delia filed a case of robbery and multiple rape
against this attacker and another one who was arrested later. Under suspicious circumstances, the first
suspect was able to escape from custody. On June 19th, four months later, three men again went to Delia’s
home, got her and her father out, serially raped her again, and then killed her and her father. Delia had 15
gunshot wounds all over her body. The escapee was re-arrested later and he is the prime suspect in the
second attack. But again, under suspicious circumstances, he was able to escape, and until now is on the
loose. He is an alleged member of a paramilitary group composed of indigenous men, which was sponsored
by the Aquino government and is now tolerated by the Ramos administration. Delia’s is one of the rallying
cases for the campaign to end violence against women and militarization in the Cordillera.
In this kind of situation, Igorot women are coping. We are putting up our own organizations in evacuation centers, studying and analyzing our situation, and taking actions. The Igorot women have been very active in the defense of their ancestral land. We were able to help stop the construction of the IMF-World Bank funded Chico Dams in the 1970's.

It is in recognition of the fact that there is women's oppression in our indigenous society that we have organized INNABUYOG, a regional federation of women's organizations in the Cordillera which is trying to reach out to our other Philippine and Asian sisters. We recognize our oppression to be brought about by interlocking factors of nationality, class, gender, and the fact that we are indigenous.

This is not happening in the Cordillera alone. Indigenous women from other parts of the Philippines have reported the same problems, some even worse. In the First Asian Indigenous Women's Conference convened in our city of Baguio, the Jummas, the East Timorese, the Nagas and the Karens had more terrible stories to tell.

INNABUYOG has a program of action which includes gender violence as one of the key issues that has to be addressed. The campaign to end violence against women is a continuing campaign. An important component of our program is education and training, which among other things is to make women aware of their rights as citizens, as women, and as indigenous peoples.

We support the Declaration of Women's Rights that we have drafted here a few days ago, most especially the appointment of a Special Rapporteur and the establishment of a permanent international criminal court to recognize the failure of governments to address and re-dress so many violations of human rights, especially gender-specific abuses. We also support the Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights, especially our right to our ancestral domain and to self-determination. We demand the codification of customary laws with the active participation of women, in order to include and develop those women-friendly practices and transform oppressive ones.

In the end, we have to deal with these violations on our persons, gender, and peoples, in both personal and public arenas. And it is only when we are one that we can overcome.
Charon Asetoyer  
USA-Native American

Good afternoon everyone. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank those who are responsible for granting me this time to make my presentation.

As a Native American woman living, working, and raising my family on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in Lake Andes, South Dakota, it has become obvious that many human and civil rights for Native women are constantly under attack by the dominant colonial society.

On a daily basis, women's rights are denied. The right to health care, access to it, police brutality, violations against women of domestic violence, and that double standard that exists in the court system when Native women try to access them in prosecuting their perpetrators, are the most harmful violations experienced in our communities by Native women, as well as the outlawing of religious freedoms.

Our religious freedoms are granted to us by the United States of America's Congress. At their whim, they are made legal, illegal, and legal again, and currently are under fire. As a mother, how do I tell my son who is eleven years old and who is here sitting in the crowd, that the religion you were brought into, the religion in which the ceremonies by which you received your name, were recently made illegal? He knows no other way. In fact, when I recently took a delegation of women who had come to visit our reservation to the Catholic church that was famous in our community, my son said, "Mom, what is a sin?" He doesn't have the concept of Christianity and sin. That's how different our culture is. That's how important it is for us as women to continue to struggle for those rights, so that we can teach our children and keep our culture and traditions alive and active.

Health care is a right that is guaranteed by treaty. However, as most international treaties are violated by the United States' government, so are the treaties they made with the Tribes of North America. Through constant financial erosion at the Washington, D.C. level, the annual budget of the Indian Health Services, which provides basic clinical care and surgery, can now only help people when their lives are in danger. This means that a health condition that exists, that would normally require surgery for a person to live a healthy life, must wait until the person is dying before surgery will be done. That kind of health practice increases the chances of a person dying from the complications of surgery and minimizes recovery.

In most reservation hospitals, delivering babies is a thing of the past. They are now taken off the reservation to other hospitals, most often 75 to 100 miles away, and this has a big impact on infant mortality. Currently infant mortality in our reservation communities in South Dakota range from 18.3% to a staggering high of 24.8%.

Due to low incomes and to the baby formula companies' promotion and passing out samples of their products to the mothers at the hospitals, many of our young mothers bottle feed their babies. Each month when money runs low, it is a common practice to see mothers dilute the recommended dose of formula in half to make it last longer. The Indian Health Services pays no attention to this practice, and turns its head the other way. The Indian Health Services is not actively promoting breast feeding among our young mothers. They simply continue to promote population control under the disguise of family planning.

Each year, thousands of Native women are sterilized. And most recently, with the new hormone manipulation contraceptives such as Norplant and Depro-Provera, the Indian Health Services is targeting our women for their use. There is little regard by Indian Health Services for the health of women when considering the use of these methods of contraception. The goal is to reduce the risk of a Native woman...
giving birth to another Native baby. As of the most recent Government census done in 1990, there are less than two million Native Americans in the United States of America. Before contact by the Europeans, it is estimated there were over 54 million Native people in the area now referred to as the United States of America.

This also brings to surface the organized attempts at genocide by the Federal Government, both past and present. There is a long history of attempts by the Federal Government to rid itself of Native people. In the 1700's, the famous Ben Franklin wrote in his diary, "And indeed, if it be the design of Providence to extirpate these Savages in order to make room for cultivators of the earth, it seems not improbable that Rum may be the appointed means. It has already annihilated all the tribes who formerly inhabited the sea coast."

Alcohol was and is often used to occupy, divert, and make vulnerable Native people in order to take land, minerals, and other possessions. This policy is still practiced.

At the local level, in our community as in the township of Lake Andes where I live, the white merchants run the economy. The local liquor store is owned and operated by the city of Lake Andes, South Dakota. The store allows Native people who are on public assistance and Federal welfare to charge alcohol up to the amount of their monthly check.

At the Federal level, the Indian Health Services has never developed a proper health-oriented or socially appropriate response to alcohol problems for Native people, and especially for Native women.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the leading birth defect for Native babies. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is an irreversible birth defect caused by a mother drinking alcohol during her pregnancy, with such effects as mental retardation, deformed brains, hearts, lungs, and other organs. It also deforms the limbs, hands, and the joints. It is totally preventable. Currently, there are few if any treatment centers that will take pregnant Native women who are chemically addicted to alcohol beyond the seventh month of pregnancy.

Often, Native women will not enter into treatment because they are not allowed to take their children. They are confronted with having to turn their children over to the welfare system for foster care. And most Native women will not do that.

Currently, there is a movement on reservations to arrest pregnant Native women who are drinking alcohol and to put them in jail. Yes, this will stop them from drinking alcohol during pregnancy, but there are no medical or prenatal services for the women once they have been arrested. This practice has its own set of problems, and can put both the mother and child at great risk of dying.

Another health problem that plagues Native people is diabetes. Most people do not think of Native people as suffering with diabetes. However, 70% of the population over the age of 40 on many reservations in the United States of America, including the one I live on, have diabetes. Most native people who have diabetes suffer from many of the secondary complications of diabetes, such as blindness, kidney failure, and limb amputation. Many of the causes of diabetes have been perpetuated by the Federal Government. The first was when they herded us onto reservations, slaughtered our buffalo, then took away all of the tools we used to hunt our wild game. Then they started bringing salted pork and other processed foods to us in barrels. Through the years, there have been laws passed to keep us from fishing our rivers, hunting wild game, and harvesting wild fruits and nuts. Often, the wild foods we have managed to harvest in current times are heavily sprayed with herbicides and pesticides, thus causing cancers, birth defects, and other health problems.

However, these days the canned and processed foods come to the reservations from the United States Department of Agriculture in the form of commodities—food packed in salt and sugars to preserve them. They now have other chemicals in them to give them a longer shelf life, and all contribute to poor health. It is not uncommon for a family of four to get ten to fifteen pounds of shortening or lard to fry food in, thirty pounds of white processed flour, canned meat, canned chicken, or ten pounds of processed cheese, and
Founder and executive director of the Matin American Women's Health Education Resource Center, Asetoyer testified on issues of education, economic development, land and water rights as they affect the Native American community. Common problems include involuntary sterilization, fetal alcohol syndrome, and deliberate withholding of information on reproductive health care and rights.

cans of vegetables and fruit. There are no fresh foods and little fiber. This sudden change in our diets has had a tremendous effect on our health and well being.

All throughout our history, the United States government has experimented on Native people with different forms of germ warfare, such as introducing small pox, T.B., and other diseases. They have also used Native people for medical experimentation, and most recently they have experimented with the hepatitis A and B vaccines by using the children in the schools. Their reason is that they are the most easy to track for follow up. The tactics used to convince the tribal councils include promises of large government grants and improved health care. The communities on the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and the Standing Rock reservations strongly protested this experimentation with their children. The Indian Health Services then tried to get young mothers to enroll their children in the vaccination program by passing out free disposable diapers at local pow wows and social events. The federal government will stop at nothing to move forward its agenda, with no regard for the outcomes or for who might be hurt. Human rights are not a consideration of the federal government when dealing with Native people.

Currently, Native communities and the reservations of the United States of America have become the new frontier for corporate America and its toxic wastes. Over the past three years, more than 65 reservations have been approached for the development of dump sites for toxic waste. The kinds of waste involve radioactive waste, commercial waste, and medical waste. This effort has been assisted by the federal government; it recently created the Office of Radioactive Waste Management, which has targeted the reservations to house the country's most highly radioactive wastes. There has been no regard for our health and well-being, or for the longterm effect of toxic and radioactive wastes and how they will affect our health, our reproductive health, the deformity of our children, and cancer and related illnesses.

The dumping of toxic and radioactive wastes on our reservations is not new. Currently, there are several Native communities whose people are dying from cancer, and whose women are having deformed children and high rates of miscarriage because of the toxic and radioactive wastes that have been ditched on our reservations.

Will the United Nations ever move to halt the injustices that are perpetrated on the indigenous peoples within the boundaries of the United States government? I ask you that. In the strongest, wealthiest, richest, most powerful country there is, so they say. Why doesn't the United States stop and take a look at what is going on within its boundaries, and put a halt to it? If they can do it to us within its boundaries, they can and will do it to you.
Ayesha Arshad
Bangladesh

I am Ayesha Arshad, member of the National Council of the Bangladesh Trade Union Centre, and General Secretary of the Garments Federation of Bangladesh. I would like all my sisters and brothers participating in this human rights conference to accept warm greetings from myself and from my country.

I joined Aristocrat Garments, Dhaka, in 1980 as a training operator. About 50 men and 300 other women were also employed there. The men earned a monthly wage of Taka 1200 (US$30), while women doing exactly the same work earned 2/3 of the men's wage, a sum of Taka 800 (US$20). Management was more repressive toward women; men were given leave and wage raises if they demanded them, but any woman who raised her voice faced the threat, too often carried into action, of dismissal. Women are so afraid of losing our jobs and face so many social obstacles that we often silence ourselves from protesting, and tolerate extreme exploitation. Another strong inhibiting factor against women's organizing to demand their rights is that if women lose their jobs, they face increased tension in their homes and may even be subjected to family violence. Women who are struggling for their economic survival continue to face extreme repression and violence in society, in the workplace, and in the home. Being women is our crime.

I want to share a personal experience with you. This happened a few days after I started working. Another woman worker, in the same job as me, was earning a quarter of my wages, Taka 150 (US$4). There was no way of protesting this kind of injustice. We just had to tolerate it and continue, or we risked losing our jobs.

Suddenly, one morning, this woman fell unconscious on the floor. The doctor could not find anything wrong with her. Later, when she regained consciousness, we heard the reason for her falling ill. Her husband was dead and she had a baby son. She had no source of financial support. Her house was almost three miles from the factory, and every day she had to walk all the way, work from 8 am to 8 pm, and then walk back again. On many occasions, she couldn't afford to eat all day and had to spend whatever money she had to buy food and milk for her son. In the last six months, she had sold her blood on three occasions in order to buy milk for him. This is why she fainted.

Other women arranged to take her home, and gave donations for her treatment. We also raised the issue with the management and tried to persuade them to raise her wages. They refused to listen to us, because we were only workers. We were unorganized and we had no bargaining power. Although this woman had been working in the same factory for over a year, she had not received any increase in her wages. Month after month, the management exploited her weakness to deny her rights. Men protest, but women face greater difficulties in protesting: social and cultural perceptions, and restrictions on our mobility limit our employment possibilities.

Soon after this incident, it was May 1, International Solidarity Day for all workers and a national holiday. Management told the women workers that we would lose our jobs unless we worked on May Day. Men workers were given a holiday. Women were not given a holiday. We were told that women do not need to take part in meetings and processions, and so we didn't need a holiday. But they should understand that we are also workers. We are never given any concessions as women on the factory floor. The Government never took any action against those who kept factories open, illegally violating worker's rights. We know of many violations of this type, but no employers have ever been prosecuted and they continue to violate our rights, year after year.

I couldn't square this with my conscience, and felt that I couldn't tolerate this kind of violation of our rights. Some women workers met with the senior operators to inform them that we refused to work on May
Day. But the management refused to accept our demand. I then raised the case of the woman who fell unconscious, and told them that they never acknowledged our problems, they totally subordinated our interests, and treated us like animals. The day after we refused to work, we were blocked from entering the factory. But united pressure from the workers ensured that we could enter.

But again two days later, when we were working inside, I suddenly felt suffocated, and in front of my eyes, ten to fifteen women slipped unconscious to the floor from their machines. I rushed to the gate, but found it locked. Several of us kept screaming for the gate to be opened, but no one came. We lay the unconscious women below the fan. I opened the windows and called for help and for the police. Some time later, the gate was opened. I kept shouting for people to call ambulances, or the women will die. We carried the women down and took them to the emergency ward. The doctor's report said they had been affected by some kind of gas. Management insisted we had fainted due to the heat. Our protest began.

Stories appeared in the daily newspaper. The main issue around which our struggle was held was "Repression of Workers and the May Day Incident." On that issue, I called all workers, women and men, together to discuss what action could be taken to resolve the dispute. We marched to the Press Club and we met trade union leaders. With their assistance, we decided to form a trade union. With a lot of difficulties, we collected the necessary forms and deposited them with the Labour Directorate. The management began a policy of repression against all the workers and particularly targeted me. They used both the police and mastans (thugs) to harass us. Everyone on my committee had their employment terminated. When we were told of the termination, the management's mastans were present. I left in fear of my life. After this, another nine workers were dismissed.

The Joint Labour Directorate informed us that they had been threatened that if they registered us as a trade union, they would all lose their jobs. They advised us to seek legal protection.

I sought legal help, and after nine months the court gave judgement recognizing us as a trade union. We formed a new committee and I worked with them on organizing the union.

The leaders of the Trade Union Centre appointed me as a member of the National Committee. I joined Singa-Bangla Garments. I formed another union in 1983 and was elected as the President of the Union. I also helped in the formation of another seven unions in neighboring factories, with the help of trade union leaders and organizers.

In Bangladesh, as in other countries of the Third World, women and women workers in particular, suffer inhuman exploitation. The economic exploitation of their labor and patriarchal oppression results in severe violations of women's human rights. Many women workers are forced to work until ten pm daily. There is no provision for rest, for transport to the workplace, for medical assistance, or for childcare. Women are rarely able to obtain their legal entitlement to maternity benefits. We are also denied access to legal protection of our rights.

The situation of women working in rural areas is even more desperate. Women are involved in a range of occupations, including construction, but in every area they are denied fair wages. In all these cases, their human rights are being violated. The IMF and the World Bank dictate our official policies.

Discrimination between women and men in the workplace is pervasive. Women are the victims of inhuman behavior and harassment.

Child workers are also being dismissed in the thousands as a result of the recent Harkins Bill to be passed in the United States. They are being thrown out of work in the name of ending child labor. But no alternatives have been provided for them, and they are left abandoned in the streets.

I work at the grassroots level. When I meet these children, I discuss their problems. I feel like a criminal for being unable to do anything for them. We observe the laws and denounce child labor as illegal, but the law must serve the people—people cannot be forced only to serve the law. These children want to develop as human beings. They have a right to survival and to full development with human dignity. But has anyone
thought of how this will be possible? We need to consider this urgently. They are our future generation. The only way to ensure their human rights is to ensure their survival. Every person with a conscience has a duty to ensure their survival. I appeal to you on behalf of all workers and on behalf of my country to consider the economic situation before enacting laws. Otherwise, not only will human rights not be protected, but human rights violations will occur. Children will be forced into illegal and hazardous activities.

It is not only children, but also women who are being forced by economic desperation to migrate overseas in search of work. We all know of their problems. What are we able to do for them? We need to first consider that the women and children of our country are similarly disadvantaged, in that both are kept in ignorance of their rights and are denied access to justice. We should view them not as women and children, but as human beings suffering violations of their rights.

It is impossible for me to communicate the twelve years of my life as a worker to you within a space of ten minutes. There is no end to the discussion of the problems and difficulties faced by workers. I organize workers, and I am a worker myself. We will struggle and fight for our rights whenever we have to. But we also need your cooperation. One day we will be successful. I end with my thanks to you all.

Field worker for Ain O Salish Kendra, Arshad testified on the denial of working women's rights through violence in the workplace. Arshad was herself a garment worker for many years and has been a vocal and active leader of the labour movement in Bangladesh.
Elaine Hewitt
Barbados

Caribbean women live in the New World, but there is nothing new in our stories of suffering and human rights violations. Along our historical voyage, Caribbean women have witnessed and experienced:

1) the genocide of indigenous people, and
2) the enslavement of Africans and the indentureship of Indians for the purpose of economic exploitation.

Women are still reeling from the social, political, and economic legacy of this brutal and inequitable history. Despite reports that women in the Caribbean have progressed, that we have attained equality with men, that we have every opportunity and are taking these opportunities, still our everyday experiences in our homes, work places, and in all aspects of our lives speak of oppression and violation because we are women. I am here on behalf of my Caribbean sisters to testify to the every day violations of our human rights.

The majority of States in the Caribbean have signed and ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These States, therefore, have accepted the principles of freedom, equity, and equality between women and men, and between nations.

Despite all that our nations have agreed to, our reality is one of discrimination on the basis of sex. If the Women's Convention is a human rights document that defines equality within the family, as well as the role of the State in protecting that equality, then we observe significant non-compliance in the Caribbean.

There are countries:

Where women still are not guaranteed equal rights under the Constitution;
Where wives of nationals are entitled to citizenship while the same is still not true for husbands of nationals;
Where unmarried female pregnant teachers can be dismissed upon a second pregnancy. No such disability is placed on a single man with children; and
Where the real property of a man who dies intestate passes on to the eldest son.

Discrimination also continues indirectly when the law fails to take account of the social and economic reality of women's lives.

I want to now speak to you of Reproductive Rights and Violence Against Women. Many Caribbean states have yet to legislate in areas of the private sphere (the home), where women are most vulnerable to abuse by men. By failing to pass laws which would stem domestic violence, these States condone that violence and the subordination of women.

In no country in the English-Speaking Caribbean region is rape criminalized within marriage. In one country, Trinidad and Tobago, where the women's movement unsuccessfully tried to have marital rape criminalized, the dominant response can be typified by the comment of the then deputy Prime Minister:

I am opposed to it (criminalization of marital rape) on religious grounds. What happens between a man and his wife in the privacy of the bedroom is their business.

The procedure and emotional difficulties which a woman must overcome before asserting her rights to the protection of the law cannot be understated. Women victims of sexual violence can expect years of traumatic court appearances and delays, with no guarantee of having justice done on their behalf. I think of a seven-year-old Trinidadian girl who was raped and sodomized by a man in her village. After twelve years of
delays in prosecution, her case was dismissed on the grounds that the undue delay was a violation of the human rights of the accused.

And there are still judges who feel that the principles used in sentencing first time offenders are equally applicable to rapists. Giving long jail terms are therefore seen as unnecessarily “sentencing a man away for life.” The attention given to the treatment of sexual offenders, whilst a valid human rights concern, speaks to the male bias in the legal system and in the cultural norms that underpin that bias. There is little concern for the victim's rights, and still less for the collective right of all women to security of person.

There is no country in the English-Speaking Caribbean where women can get a legal abortion on demand. In societies where the legislatures are controlled by men, where the churches are controlled by men, women's bodies are the terrain for the battle of the sexes; a battle which privileges the needs of men at the expense of women's rights to privacy and security of person.

When population policies require it, women are pressured into the use of unsafe contraceptives or are the victims of forced sterilization. Men's agendas are determined by their gender. And their agenda constantly denies the right of women to control their own bodies. If rights refer to a body of protection to which women are entitled, then we have no reproductive rights in the Caribbean.

I now turn to Socio-Economic Rights. Articles 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights both address the individual's rights to social and economic security. In this regard, many women in the Caribbean have the sole responsibility for the economic well-being of their children. Over 40% of all households are female-headed. Given the low levels of wages and high levels of unemployment, the contribution of low-income women to family income is significant. Still, in many countries of the Caribbean, there are no laws which grant women the right to maternity leave and pay. Women reproduce the society at their own economic risk.

In many countries, the lowest level of minimum wage is accorded to the household assistant. Indeed, in one country, the minimum wage for the household assistant is even less than the minimum wage for a juvenile. These workers are women. The undervaluing of this type of work (cleaning, cooking and child care) reflects most poignantly the societal perception of women's worth.

Women's economic vulnerability is deepened by the structural adjustment policies dictated by international financial institutions. In countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Guyana, and Barbados, resources are used to service the external debt at the expense of the social sector. Cutting government expenditure under Structural Adjustment Programmes has meant reduced access to health care, education, housing, and social security benefits for women. The majority of those who have lost their jobs under these policies are also female, since women predominate in the social sector. In sum, this means greater poverty for women. The sector of the population which benefitted the least from the international loans (women and children) is now being made to bear the greatest burden.

These international linkages between the Caribbean countries and the multi-lateral funding agencies have perpetuated the economic inequality which has always characterized the relationship between the North and the Caribbean. More so, this relationship may doom generations to come to dire poverty and dependence.

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration, which calls for international cooperation for the realization of social and economic rights, has never been honored. Women, bearers and rearers of children, carers of the aged and disabled, managers of households, and producers of goods and services, feel most acutely the effects of the violations of these articles. And there is a relationship between national economic underdevelopment and violence against women. While violence against women occurs within all classes, there is no disputing that the economic crisis reduces a woman’s power to resist. Studies from Guyana, for example, suggest the women of low-income status suffer violence more frequently. Women with few resources have less options.
I think of Tara’s tragic story. Battered for 15 years by her husband, she finally found the courage to seek refuge in a shelter. Because she had to leave in emergency circumstances, Tara was forced to leave her children, two teenage sons and a daughter, behind. Tara has no resources of her own. She can’t find other accommodations to house her children and herself. There are no governmental support services to help her. She worked as a domestic employee, but lost her job because of her husband’s threats to the employer. The children, who had witnessed and hated the violence, now hate their mother for leaving them in order to save her own life.

Battered women are always forced to make difficult choices. These choices are the more tragic because women make them knowing that their quality of life may not improve.

I can attest to domestic violence. I am a survivor. I lived that life for more years than I care to remember. Why did I stay? I was a prisoner of the conspiracy of silence, I felt powerless. In believing that tomorrow could be better, I finally left, penniless, homeless, and with two children to support. It took me many years to recover. But I recovered despite the censure of society. What I have today is my self-esteem and my spiritual wellness. My sons only now understand the choice I had to make.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Caribbean women don’t have the luxury of addressing only political and civil liberties. We don’t have the luxury of only concerning ourselves with economic development issues. We don’t have the luxury of compartmentalizing women’s rights. For us, women’s rights are human rights. Women’s rights to equity, personal safety, and integrity are as important as the economic rights to food, health, and jobs. And as women from the Caribbean, these rights cannot be attained so long as our resources are controlled and appropriated, by the North and by those in our own societies who benefit from the exploitative practices of capitalist development.

In conclusion, we the women of the New World are wondering, "when will this New World come for us?" In solidarity and sisterhood, we are here to add our voices to everybody else’s, because we say we shall succeed and we shall overcome. I thank you.
testimonies on political persecution and discrimination

Maria Olea
Chile/United States

Good afternoon, my name is María Olea. I am the coordinator of Mujeres Unidas y Activas (Women United and Active), a community-based organization of 180 immigrant and refugee women who come from Latin American countries and who now live in the United States. Mujeres is part of the Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services in San Francisco, California. The primary goal of Mujeres is to inform, educate, support and organize Latina immigrant women so that we exercise our rights and understand the system in the United States; so that we recover our self-esteem and reclaim our strength to continue the struggle for our rights and those of our families; so that we can become leaders in our communities and use our own voices to advocate for change and for social justice.

As a Chilean woman, a mother, and a community worker who has been in the United States for five years, I am a witness to the abuses and discriminations experienced by millions of migrant women. In the United States and other countries, the right to have a dignified life, the rights to health, education, and an environment free from political, religious, and social discrimination must be recognized as human rights, and be monitored to ensure that they truly exist rather than simply appear on a piece of paper.

It is unacceptable that the United States and other developed countries, which rely on our labor and depend economically on immigrants, refuse to treat us as human beings. I want you to know how racist and anti-migration sentiments affect us, and to tell you that the rights of all persons, regardless of the color of their skin or of their gender, must be universally protected. I want to let you know how it feels when the United States government makes us scapegoats and says that we are the cause of all the problems that this country is suffering. These serious accusations increase racist attitudes and behavior towards immigrants and can sometimes lead to physical violence. Because of these serious things which are being perpetrated against us, we must ask the United Nations to support us so that our human rights will be respected.

As an immigrant woman, I also want to tell you how we are affected by the racist and inhumane laws that have been proposed in the United States:

Children who are born in the United States from undocumented parents would not be recognized as citizens of the country.

Undocumented children would not have the right to basic education.

Pregnant women and children will not have access to health care, and when they look for it, they will be immediately reported to the immigration authorities.

As a woman, I want to share with you and the world how difficult life is for immigrant women, and how
Olena is a Chilean who fled her country in 1988 because of domestic violence in a climate of intense political violence. She believed the lives of herself and her children were threatened, and yet was not eligible for US refugee status. She testified to the hardships suffered by such immigrant women, including verbal and psychological harassment by officials, and rape by employers who take advantage of their illegal status in the US.

our problems are worsened because we are women. Many of us face abuses and hardships in our home countries, but upon becoming immigrants our situation does not change, especially for undocumented women. Many of us are raped or attacked while crossing the border, while staying in refugee camps, or on ships on the high seas.

As immigrants, we are separated from our home, our culture, our families. We live in a country where we do not understand the customs or the language; where we face daily harassment and discrimination because of the color of our skin, for the accent in our voice; where we worry daily that the immigration authorities will arrest us or deport our children. As immigrants, we are even more dependent on our husbands because we are not permitted to work and are afraid to report domestic violence to the authorities.

We are afraid to seek social services for fear we will be reported to the immigration authorities. The only work many of us can find is under miserable conditions, with long hours and low pay. It is worse where women are regularly subjected to sexual abuse by their employers, who take advantage of their precarious legal status and their desperate economic situation. For all these reasons, compounded by the day-to-day sexism, we face an even more difficult existence than that of our male counterparts.

The immigration laws in the United States also place women in a disadvantageous position. We migrate for many reasons. Some flee political violence and war, others flee economic misery, others to reunite with families, and in some cases, as in my own, we run from family and domestic violence.

In 1988, I left Chile to save my life and the life of my two children. I escaped from a dictatorial political system which offered me absolutely no support as a battered woman. Instead, the legal system supports men who abuse women. Because of this, I was forced to leave Chile, believing that the United States, a supposedly democratic country and a leader in the defense of human rights, would give me the protection I needed by granting me refugee status. But, when I arrived in the country, I merely became another undocumented woman, because the legal system of the United States doesn't consider domestic violence against women as grounds for refugee protection. So in this way, my family and I became people without a country, because we could not return to our home without facing the risk of losing our lives, and in the United States as "illegals" we are invisible.

Many immigrant women are in the same painful situation. So that is why, as a woman, a mother, I ask the United Nations to support the recommendation that domestic violence be considered for refugee status; in that way, we will save the lives of many women and children.

I also want to say that, in practice, there seems to be two categories of human beings: the ones who have rights and the immigrants who do not. Today, at this tribunal, we are speaking with a sense of urgency that you address the rights of women of all categories. We immigrant and refugee women ask that we be respected as full human beings, and not be divided up and accorded different standards merely because of our legal status.

Today, you have heard the testimonies of the horrors faced by the brave women here. To that testimony I want to add the voice of immigrant women, women without a country. My country, Chile, does not feel it owes me any rights or protection—nor can I return there. My new country, the United States, only barely recognizes my existence and does not respond to my requests for help. We immigrants have no country or government to advocate on our behalf. For that reason, we come to the United Nations, asking that this international body listen to our testimony and advocate for the protection of our human rights.

Thank you very much for this great opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of my immigrant sisters.
Gertrude Fester  
South Africa

Friends, sisters, comrades. Praise be to the name of women. We have heard not victims today, but survivors. I want to share my story and those of other women in South Africa.

I was an executive member of the United Women’s Organization. We actively worked for both women’s liberation and national liberation. We all demanded the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC). In 1985, the state of emergency was declared. This day, the police became empowered. It was the South African government’s way of responding to the uprising and demands of the oppressed people. This meant that the South African police had unprecedented powers. Anti-apartheid activists were prevented from meeting, they were jailed, some died in detention under mysterious circumstances, others just simply disappeared. As executive members of organizations, including all women’s organizations and political organizations, we were all on the run and wanted by the police. This meant that you could not stay in the same house for more than three or four days, or else the police might get to know about your whereabouts. We disguised ourselves, changed our cars. I had to change my appearance often. Friends and families assisted us with changing cars. Then, after nearly two years of this type of hectic and very traumatic life, in May 1988, I was detained.

It was four AM, and the house I was living in at that time with two other women, my mother and a friend, was surrounded by about 20 security policemen, all armed. For the next 40 minutes, they walked around the house. Then at 4:30 they banged on the door. I opened the door and was confronted by three enormous Afrikaner policemen. You know, it seems they handpick them especially to intimidate. Their size dwarfed me. I need to contextualize my situation. Because these were white Afrikaner men, it was more frightening to me.

After they searched the house and ransacked everything, they took me outside to the cars. I shouted to my friend to please phone an anti-apartheid lawyer. To this, the security police all burst out laughing and said, “Oh, him. We will do the same to him as we did to Albie Sachs.” (Some of you may know that Albie Sachs is an ANC member in exile whose arm was blown off by a car bomb in Mozambique.)

It was at that moment, as I was being taken away by 20 white men, that I became very, very frightened. Then, all the stories of other women friends and feminists who have been imprisoned before confronted me. Stories of rape, threats to rape you if you do not co-operate, electrodes put on your nipples, things shoved up your vagina. One woman told the story of how the police allowed a dog to lick her vagina. Shaheeda was told that if she did not cooperate, they would rape her five-year-old daughter. In another case, a police man masturbated in the cell of a friend of mine who was kept in solitary confinement. She threw a bowl of porridge at him. And here I was being “escorted” by all these men to who knows where.

For about seven hours I was interrogated. It would change, sometimes it was friendly, other times aggressive and harsh, sometimes they pushed me around, making all kinds of sexual allusions. When they find you are a feminist, they use their sexuality and their male power as a weapon over you. I was asked to be a police spy for them. When I refused to become an informer, they converged upon me. They became very aggressive and threatening. Various interrogators, about seven, stood around me. Some played with their guns, throwing them up in the air and saying, “You know, these could just accidentally go off.”

They then took me to a police station and told me I was charged under Section 29—the internal security act. This was really a blow to me. I was fooled earlier by being told that I was being held under section 3.
Under Section 29 you have no rights; you are not allowed to see a lawyer or doctors of your own choice — only the state ones. But they are part of the system, and are either hostile towards you or try to get you to co-operate. You cannot receive any visitors. In fact, friends and families are not informed about where you have been taken. You are not allowed to have books, pens, paper, nothing. The only people you see are your interrogators and your guards, who guard you twenty-four hours a day. You can be detained under section 29 for six months, and it can be renewed.

I was taken to the Wynberg police cells. I was taken down this corridor to where I was to be kept. All the cells were closed, they all had heavy steel doors. Then we came to my cell, the door was open, and there was a small table outside the door, and a woman, I assumed the guard, was seated at a table. I walked through, there was a small court yard of about three by five meters. Only the barred gates were closed after me. The steel door was left open, unlike all the other cells that I had passed. This courtyard led into the cell which also was three by five meters, and again, the steel door was left open and only the barred door closed so that I could be visible from the corridor. The first thing that I noticed about the cell was that the bed was opposite the cell door. Behind the bed was the toilet. Because the bed was of a small type, the toilet was fully visible to anyone from the corridor.

The cream gloss-painted walls were filled with phallocentric graffiti. I wanted to use the toilet but I felt too awkward with the open door, the guard sitting there and watching me, and worst of all, the men, either police or prisoners, passing the door. But I had to use the toilet. I then pushed my hands through the bars of the gate and tried to pull the steel door partially closed so that I could not be seen while on the toilet. When the guard saw what I was doing, she shouted that I had to be seen by her at all times, and I therefore had to leave the door open. She pushed me. I then took my bath towel and threw it over the head board of the bed so that I could be partially obscured. This too resulted in a major confrontation.

Because all the other doors in this long hallway were closed except mine, everyone who passed would peer in curiously, and jeer and comment, and there I was on the toilet open to all these comments. Sometimes, I had incredible cramps in my muscles because of trying to sit so awkwardly so as not to be seen on the toilet. Going to the toilet was always a major ordeal.

That first night, as I opened the blankets to get into the bed, I was confronted with a drawing of an enormous erect penis on the sheet. I threw it off and asked for another sheet but this was denied. I then made up the bed so that I could not see this penis nor touch it with any part of my body.

It was winter. The door was always open, and there were only bars on the windows. The cell was often wet. I would awake with the most excruciating pains in my arms and legs. I then developed arthritis. My interrogator, again one those enormous Afrikaner male clones, would threaten me and say that by the time he was done with me, my whole body would be in pain.

At the offices to which I was taken for interrogation, I was never let out of anyone's sight. I was therefore very puzzled that I had to be stripped when I returned from interrogation. But I soon realized that it was to humiliate me rather than search me. It was this Captain's (my main interrogator) way of exercising his power over me.

The Captain would stand at the door of my cell while shouting instructions to the two police women who were stripping me. After they took off my jacket, I decided to strip myself, throwing my clothes all around the cell. He would stand there bellowing orders. It was winter, but while I stood there naked, I never felt any cold, only humiliation, anger, and resentment at my powerlessness. Once they had left me, I would compose poems in my mind of these incidents.

Maybe I should contextualize my state of mind. Because of my solitary confinement, I had pseudo-hallucinations. I saw a tree walking into my cell door. At first I was scared, but then reassured myself that it was "Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane." Then I saw this ghost of my father. I later realized that I was momentarily in the worlds of "Macbeth" and "Hamlet." I often could not distinguish between reality and
illusion. I was kept in solitary confinement for nearly four months. During this period, there were times when I was left in my cell for up to three weeks. No, they did not torture me during these periods; they knew that my mind was torturing me.

I then wished that they would fetch me for interrogation, just for some human interaction. Then, when they fetched me and the renewed threats and abuse started, I would know that I preferred to remain in the cell with my torturing thoughts. I thought or believed that I was insane. This too assisted my interrogator, as sometimes I would just sit there numb, agreeing to whatever he said to me. Then I would come to my senses, realize what was happening and challenge him.

Yes, the fact that he was physically so much bigger and stronger than I was, that the state apparatus was on his side, my physical illness, hallucinations and insecurity about my sanity, the isolation, the facts that he was white and male, really rendered me powerless sometimes. But then there were the other times when I confronted him and the illegitimacy of the state; when the correctness of what I stood for, and the inspiration of all those others who had gone before me and had suffered far more than I was, assisted me. My religion also gave me strength. I composed a poem about these negative experiences. It was difficult at first, not having pen and paper, but one is astonished at the resilience of the self in those circumstances.

I was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison where I was placed in the same section as, although separated by five cells from, a co-accused. The two of us had the entire section to ourselves, with minimal contact with other prisoners. The other co-accused woman was white, and hence in a different section. They really used the divide and conquer tactic. The white woman was allowed to have privileges that we were not allowed.

It was similar with the male co-accuseds. We had joint legal consultation. And once again, we were surprised at their benefits. Women political prisoners were fewer in number and their struggles in prison much harder, and still we had fewer privileges. More focus and attention are given by the media to the males' plight. While I was on trial, I was dismissed from the Department of Education and Culture on charges of misconduct. I know of many other male teachers employed by the same department who were never dismissed at all.

In February 1990, the African National Congress was unbanned. So after one year and ten months, the charges were withdrawn. After my release, I had to spend three months in a hospital for nervous disorders. I want to emphasize that what happened to me was easy compared to what others have suffered. It is also important to mention that, even though the South African government wants to give the impression that everything has changed, these actions are still continuing, especially in the rural areas. The government has sanctioned torture and brutality in the past and is still doing so, even though it is trying to convince the South African electorate to vote for it again.

Fester is a coordinator for the Gender Advocacy Project of the African National Council Women's League. As a former political prisoner of the apartheid regime, she was held in solitary confinement under constant surveillance and sexually harassed. She also testified on behalf of other women prisoners subjected to torture and punishment in detention.
Norma Valle  
Puerto Rico

My name is Norma Valle. I give my testimony as an individual and also as a voice for the many other women who, like me, have been persecuted, harassed and monitored by the state for more than a decade. The reason for this monitoring and harassment is that we are feminists who believe that the women's movement is an instrument for our emancipation struggles. The state has persecuted us by infiltrating our women's rights organizations, by interfering with our human right to organize toward a just cause, and by persecuting us in our professional and personal lives.

I believe that feminism should be an integral part of all aspects of my public and private life. I have been a feminist activist since 1969. I was President of the Sociedad de Mujeres Periodistas and la Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas, and I was a member of the Directive Junta of the Journalists' Union.

I have done all that while continually being harassed and pressured by the government. I started to feel the discrimination just after I had been elected president of the Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas. I was also persecuted and discriminated against during nine years of work at the newspaper El Mundo. In 1975, I was transferred between five different departments of the editorial office in a period of five months. First, I was a political reporter, then I was transferred into the sports section, later I was a community reporter, and finally they changed my working hours—all to try to make it too difficult for me to work. I constantly felt targeted. I remember one day, my work partner called me in and reprimanded me for a mere eight-minute delay in a report. I looked at her and said, "Maggie, why are you doing this to me?" Both of us cried. In 1976, tired of struggling against co-workers whom I had once considered friends, I left my job.

For many months I could not find another job. I worked as a sales clerk in clothing stores; I wrote freelance articles for public relations agencies; I did many odd jobs to survive. A friend got me a part-time job at a private Catholic university teaching two journalism classes. At the beginning of each semester, the director would question my presence there. Why should they keep this "feminist communist"? Just after I had my baby, I was offered a job to write "human interest" articles. It was at first a part-time job, but turned into full-time. But after I had been at this job for three months, and I was about to be made a permanent employee, my boss fired me. The president told me that "every time my name was mentioned, the structure of the newspaper would shake." I was unemployed for many months. I was a single mother.

During this period, I continued to feel persecuted. When I was driving my car, I felt people following me. Sometimes, I would park my car in one place and later I would find it some place else. I really believed I was being watched by the government. Once, I was in New York doing research for a book and two men followed me around the whole city. I was scared. And I was angry at those who had been my friends. I almost felt that I was losing my ability to reason, that I was going crazy.

In 1980, I was employed by the Puerto Rican State University. First, I was a part-time worker, and later I became full-time, thanks to the director of the School of Communications and to some friends who mentioned my name for the job. But in 1982 I was fired, even before the documents for my permanent job were completed. I then started a new period of economic instability that lasted for two years.

Many of my friends were also subjected to such persecution and harassment, and gave up. But I have not, because I have had the support of my family and friends who recognized my struggle.

The "feminist" or "too feminist" label has caused me to be persecuted until today.
When, in 1989, the Supreme Tribunal of Puerto Rico ordered that 130,000 files of those considered subversives be turned over, I received the file kept on me, with information that had been collected for over a decade by the State Police and the Justice Department: File #5457, dossier IS-D-021-79 of NIE. For being a feminist, I was considered a subversive. I found out that the discrimination and persecution I had suffered in my personal life, the discrimination at work, and my frequent unemployment, were a result of numerous visits by intelligence agents to my neighbors, my parents, and my bosses at my various jobs, and the investigation of everything I had ever said or done. They had the license plate numbers of all the cars I had ever had; they investigated all my private and confidential documents; they documented people who had visited me. The harassment had been real, concrete—I had the evidence in my own hands.

According to the Puerto Rican government, which is controlled by the FBI, it is a crime to talk about women’s rights. To talk about the right of Puerto Rican women to struggle for self-determination and the independence of its people, to say that women have always been excluded throughout history, is the crime that I perpetrated.

I declare myself guilty of pointing out women’s exclusion, and have come here to share with men and women who want to hear me and work in defense of an egalitarian humanity. I am also guilty of teaching my university students and my daughter that feminism is a legitimate doctrine that must be validated by the United Nations and other international organizations. I believe that women’s organizations have been threatened and subjected to persecution and harassment by governments. This danger is what we are fighting against here today.

When I received the my police file, I had to laugh at the stupidity. But I was also filled with a horrible anger against the intelligence agency, and I cried. I cried for my daughter, for my sisters, and for my friends from Puerto Rico and all over who have been exposed to harassment and the denial of their human rights.

A writer, teacher and correspondent for FemPress, the Latin American press agency on the women’s movement, Valle spoke on the persecution of feminist activists.
Ana Rivera-Lassén
Puerto Rico

Memorandum to: Captain Carmelo Melendez, Director of the Intelligence Office.
From: Agent Israel Santos.
Issue: Demonstration sponsored by the coordinator of the feminist movement.
Reason for the Activity: To celebrate the International Day Against Violence Against Women.

The following feminist organizations are listed on this document: Encuentro de Mujeres, Feministas en Marcha, and la Organización Puertorriqueña de la Mujer Trabajadora. Collaborators in the activity mentioned above are: Collectivo taller Salud, Círculo de Concientización Gay, Mujeres Artistas de Puerto Rico, and Círculo de Estudios Feministas de Trujillo Alto.

This is an example of the memorandums which appear in dossier # 6288 of the Puerto Rican Police Intelligence Office. This dossier was compiled on the woman who speaks to you now.

The Puerto Rican police have been watching me and keeping information on me under the category of "subversive and terrorist." This is due to my participation in the feminist movement and in activities to promote women’s rights.

Feminists organized in Puerto Rico during the 1970’s, in accordance with the rights that we had under the laws of the island. Under the constitution of the Puerto Rico, all people are guaranteed the right to meet and to free association. It is also guaranteed that we cannot be discriminated against for reasons of race, color, origin, sex, and political and religious ideas. During the decade of the 1970’s, especially in 1972 when we founded the Mujer Integrar Ahora, I was very young, only 16 years old, and I believed in justice. I did not then know its consequences.

The practice of keeping files on people or persecuting people due to political ideas has a long history. But in Puerto Rico, the fact that this practice was discovered to be related to a far more serious practice—a series of murders of "terrorists" by the police—had a strong impact on the public opinion. The police, the Justice Department, and the state were watching people and keeping information about them, even when they had not been involved in any crime. It was done just because these people had opinions and ideas different from the state.

This practice was questioned by a national tribunal, which demanded that the Puerto Rican police and the Justice Department stop and give the files to the respective subjects. When we received these files on our activities, we realized that, for the Puerto Rican government, working for better opportunities for women in the society was considered to be subversive.

The file on the feminist organization Mujer Integrar Ahora, for example, had data from as far back as 1976. The file of this organization was full of wrong data about its founding, its ideology, and objectives. It contained pictures and information about activities, and documentation related to women rights. It also contained newspaper clippings about activities of the organization.

In the case of an individual feminist’s file, the watching and recording had started early, at least since 1974. The watching of the individual members of the organization Mujer Integrar Ahora, as well as of members of the Alianza Feminista por la Liberación Humana, and of the Federacion de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas, started in the 1970’s. During the 1980’s, it was extended to members of other organizations. For all the members of these organizations, this persecution had personal consequences that
directly affected these women's lives. Some of them lost their jobs because officials would come to their work place to talk about them. Others had problems with their neighbors due to the police coming to interrogate them. And many times, it caused problems with family and close friends.

I, for example, suffered for many years, because I did not know that they had invented a false case about me at the Puerto Rican University. It almost prevented me from continuing my law studies. And all we get for all the pain caused are these files.

The feminist activities that were documented by the police included forums, rallies, public demonstrations, conferences—anything related to the promotion of women's rights. Any public defense of women's reproductive rights, expressions against the violations against women or in favor of abortion or women's sexuality, were considered subversive activities. We denounce this practice of keeping files on people because of our ideology and feminist activities. We denounce it as a repressive and illegal action of the state.

Throughout this day, we have been talking about the eradication of oppression and the recognition of women's rights as human rights. The domestic violence, the violation of women inside and outside war situations, the violations of our physical integrity, the traffic of women, the denial of our rights as indigenous peoples, and the prejudice against lesbians are all based on a patriarchal system. This system will change only through our organizing against patriarchy. It is ironic that our human rights are guaranteed and our basic right to organize (to meet) is not.

A denunciation by this Tribunal would serve as a clear and impressive message that women have the right to organize in order to participate in the social and political life in their countries, and that interference with this right is a violation of our human rights.
Khalida Messaoudi
for "Oum Ali"
Algeria

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen judges, dear friends, dear sisters. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today on behalf of and instead of Nahdi Saliha, known in our country as Oum Ali, who wasn't able to come herself because she continues to be terrorized. When I asked that she come here to testify and tell you about the tragedy that she went through in June, 1989, she replied, and I quote: "I am sure that the main person charged will be acquitted because he is a man; my boy was burned, and I don't want to bury the six others, one after the other. I am too afraid."

Fifteen days ago, a journalist friend of mine was killed. He was a great writer and poet. One of his killers said on television that he had to be killed because he was too intelligent, he wrote too well, he was a danger to Muslim obscurantism. Of course, when one is an obscurantist, one is very blind. And if you don't like women, if you oppress women, you can't like poets.

Today, I will tell you the story of an Algerian woman, Oum Ali. (Oum Ali literally means "mother of Ali" which shows the Arab patriarchal tradition.) In June 1989, the Muslim army burned down her house. Her only "crime" was to be living alone. But before I tell you her story, let me explain the context. It took place in Ouargla, a small peaceful town, 850 km south of Algiers. In 1989, after 30 years of single-party rule, the Algerian people had returned to democracy and had destroyed their own Berlin wall. The popular assembly, in June 1989, was discussing the rights of men and women, without distinction, to organize politically, to have the right to freedom of expression, which is essential to democracy, like oxygen is essential to life itself.

In this context of spreading democracy (which, you can imagine, was made out of a thousand hopes, particularly of Algerian women, who were at the head of the democratic movement, who were the first builders of this democratic process), it has come as a terrible shock for women to now be living a new, horrible reality, one that they never knew before. The new reality is this: political groups using religion as a means of persuasion and terror, a means of justification to mutilate women, burn them, and persecute them. They are using religion and democracy to wipe out the bodies of women and democracy itself.

The case of Oum Ali involves a fire that killed her three year-old son. The arsonists had decided to make a public statement by attacking this divorced woman living alone with her children. In Ouargla, in June 1989, the local authorities received a petition, with 197 signatures, calling for their neighborhood to be cleared of the presence of three woman who were considered to have inappropriate lifestyles. They threatened these women. They mobilized groups of young boys to harass the women daily. When these "undesirables" did not leave the community, a group of ten men decided to take action. One evening, they came together, deliberated, and decided that fire was the only way to "purify" the neighborhood. They decided to gather again the next evening to charge and execute their judgement against the women.

Oum Ali is a 34 year old woman, recently divorced, living alone with seven children. Abandoned by her husband before the divorce, illiterate and without a job, she is the poorest of the poor, because under Islamic Law Family Code 52, neither she nor her children are protected—they do not receive any financial support. Let me say that the Family Law is the result of concessions made by the single party to the Islamics. If you give Islamics an inch, they will take a whole yard.

What did they accuse Oum Ali of? They accused her of prostitution, they accused her of making the neighborhood impure, of affecting the morality, the religiousness of the Muslims, and the spiritual health of
the town. Even if it were the case, even if she were a prostitute, they should know that if she went that route, it was because there were men willing to exploit her in the worst fashion that you can exploit another human being.

Because, in the eyes of the fundamentalists, a woman living without a husband is a menace to the good morality of the town, Oum Ali was pressured to leave. They organized, and made nightly visits to her home in order to intimidate her. She asked for the protection of the police, but they did not take her seriously. This situation persisted for a week until the night of the 22nd of June.

On the night of the 22nd of June, at three in the morning, they began throwing stones at the door of Oum Ali’s modest home. Awakened by the cries and the rain of stones, she ran to her neighbor for assistance, but he slammed the door in her face. She then went to the police station, and on the way she noticed a number of masked men in her courtyard. The police were notified, but the aggressors were already over the wall and into her home. Her oldest daughter, thirteen-years-old, brought the other children together, but had to leave behind her handicapped, three year-old brother. The daughter ran back to the house to get him, but she saw the men coming in her direction and so only had time to hide the boy under the bed. The men came into the bedroom, one of them had a knife, another a can of heating oil that he threw over the bed and lit on fire in order to “purify” the house.

The police did not come at first, until Oum Ali ran back and began screaming. This time they came, just as the corpse of her child, Ali, was being carried out. At six in the morning, the main instigator was arrested, and a few hours later, the twelve accomplices were arrested. Of the thirteen criminals, twelve were married men with children of their own. None of the arsonists were unemployed. If men persecute and kill women, it is said that it is because of economic reasons; but this has nothing to do with economics, for she was not an economic threat to them. It has only to do with sexist ideology that found its expression this way.

The day the criminals were arrested, there was a demonstration by Islamic militants of Ouargla; they marched toward the police headquarters chanting and asking for the immediate release of the arsonists. By their logic, they need not deny the crime. They believe they have the right to ensure that the religious precepts are properly followed by all. In their minds and by their convictions, they have the right to persecute any person—particularly women who are alone, who they believe are representatives of Satan, representatives of danger and immorality—and the right to persecute any person who goes against their ideas actively or simply through their existence.

A protest organized by the “Mouvement des Femmes” in July was responsible for the judgement of the murderers. Still, the sentence was ridiculous considering the severity of the crime. After an appeal by the arsonists, the courts gave the heaviest sentence of 15 years to the principal instigator, 10 years to the next in charge, and less than 10 years each to the others. Considering the hideous nature of the crime, the premeditation, the murder of a child, the aggression against a woman, and considering the strict nature of our penal code, which typically punishes very severely, we can only wonder about this lax sentence, the complicity of the courts, the concessions made on the bodies and lives of women.

Oum Ali, as I said, refused to come here today. She is still terrorized.

The case of Oum Ali was only the beginning of a campaign of violence against women that rose to the point of terrorism against academics and journalists. The campaign of Muslim fundamentalist violence against women taught us that without international solidarity, we risk being crushed under the coalition of patriarchal power.

From 1989 to 1990: In Ouargla, Oum Ali’s house was burned. In Mascara, a young girl was burned by her brother because she refused to stop working. Her brother thought that her work was allowing her to be in contact with men. In Remchi, the house of a widow was burned because she was living alone, without a husband; she represented a “danger” to the community. In Annaba, a teacher saw her house burned because she was a member of a women’s group. In Blida, the Islamic militia imposed a 6:00 PM curfew for
female students at the University. A female student disobeyed the curfew and was whipped. The next year, in Bousseada and in Msila, more widows were burned out of their homes. Today, the same fires and murders are committed against women, policemen, students, journalists, etc.

The question that I would like to ask is: is it true that Islam as a religion is the cause of this evil? Is it true that Mohammed was more of a misogynist than Moses or Jesus? Is it true that the Muslim religion can only oppress women? If I have to accept this idea, that the Muslim religion is the oppressor of women, then I will have to say it is the Church that liberated the Swedish women—and it is not true! We must all be aware that Islam, like any other religion, can be a source of goodness, but it can also be a dangerous institution taking over power.

The second question I want to ask is: Why do these Muslim fundamentalists mobilize themselves over the bodies of women? Why are all their political resources directed towards persecution? Maybe I have part of the answer: a Muslim fundamentalist movement is a totalitarian movement, and a totalitarian movement cannot tolerate differences. A woman herself is a symbol of “otherness.” Also, as a totalitarian movement, it has nothing else to offer society but totalitarianism.

According to the totalitarian logic, Muslim fundamentalists believe that the submission of the whole society necessarily passes through the submission of women. The persecution of women is a subtle political way to keep all of society in an oppressive silence and in a state of terror. Behind the persecution of women you will find the will to terrorize the whole society, to paralyze and anaesthetize it, because if you have a terrorized society, a paralyzed society, an anaesthetized society, you can do whatever you want.

You can turn it into a society directed by people who represent the worst dictatorship today. We already have many governments of that type, whose kind of government is the persecution of women. Behind the persecution of women lies the persecution of the whole society. There is little hope in this stage of history, a stage of crisis where the landmarks are blurred, where the Muslim fundamentalists have nothing else to offer the people other than unemployment and oppression.

Now, I would like to talk to you, Western women. I’d like also to address the judges. If, in Algeria, a political party whose political program and model of society is based on the persecution of women, if a political party like this wishes to take power, will you be with me against it or with it against me? This question today in Algeria is often asked. Men and women are victims under the terrorism.

To conclude, I would like to invite you never to forget that every fundamentalist is a potential militant who feels that he has been chosen by God, that in the name of God he must go on a mission of control, and that in the name of God he has power over the lives and desires of others, and is justified in eliminating “undesirables.” We must not forget that fascism is not an opinion but a crime, that fascists will not hesitate to use democracy to bury democracy as well as the rights of women.

Let us not forget that behind every Muslim fundamentalist is an international force with its political, logistic, and military means. Behind the fundamentalists, there are the states. Therefore, I call for international solidarity of feminists around the world. I don’t want to take up arms. I am a pacifist. But faced with this monstrous fundamentalist coalition, we must create a pacifist coalition for the triumph of women’s rights.

Allow me to conclude by speaking of a woman who died in Iran. I will speak for her because I am still able. Iranian women cannot even dream of speaking for themselves. Let me just read this to you:

Saraya was buried up to her shoulders, her arms in the hole, her long black hair spread out around her. The stones were flying, her head and her chest were reduced to raw flesh. Using all his strength, the man hits her skull many times, her brain is scattered on the ground, and a big cry of joy rises, “Allah o Akbar.”

This is the story of the stoning of Saraya. Let me show you the back of this report. It is a document from Amnesty International, which published a report on this Islamic Republic where there is a law that
regulates the size of the stone with which woman must be stoned. That stone is too large, it would kill too quickly; this one is too small, it would not kill; but this one is just right—it would kill at the required speed.

Let me end by calling for your solidarity, which could perhaps go beyond the boundaries of this tribunal. I ask the United Nations to designate a special rapporteur to declare Iran and Sudan criminals against women's human rights.

Messaoudi, a mathematics teacher and founding member of the Independent Association for the Triumph of Women's Rights, testified on behalf of "Oum Ali," a single mother repudiated by her town of residence for the "crime" of having no husband. In 1989, after a period of harassment to which local police refused to respond, Oum Ali was stoned, her house was burned down, and her youngest son died in the blaze.
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publications

1. Testimonies of the Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights (September 1994). $15
2. Demanding Accountability: The Global Campaign and Vienna Tribunal on Women's Human Rights, by Niamh Reilly and Charlotte Bunch (September 1994). $15
4. International Campaign for Women's Human Rights 1992-93. $8
7. The Vienna Tribunal: Women's Rights are Human Rights (September 1994). VIDEO

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